

THE WATCHER
ON THE TOWER

BY A. G. HALES



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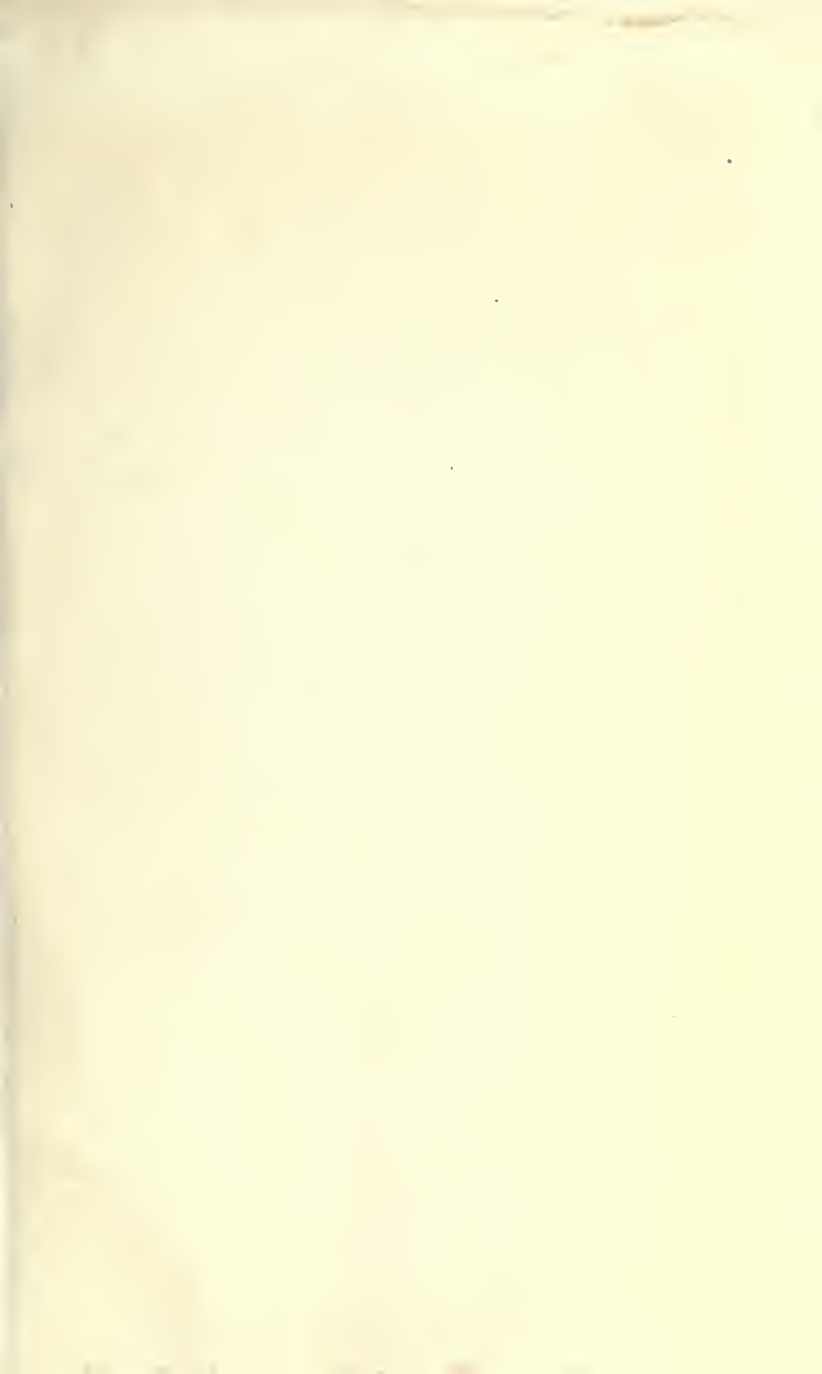


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THE WATCHER ON THE TOWER

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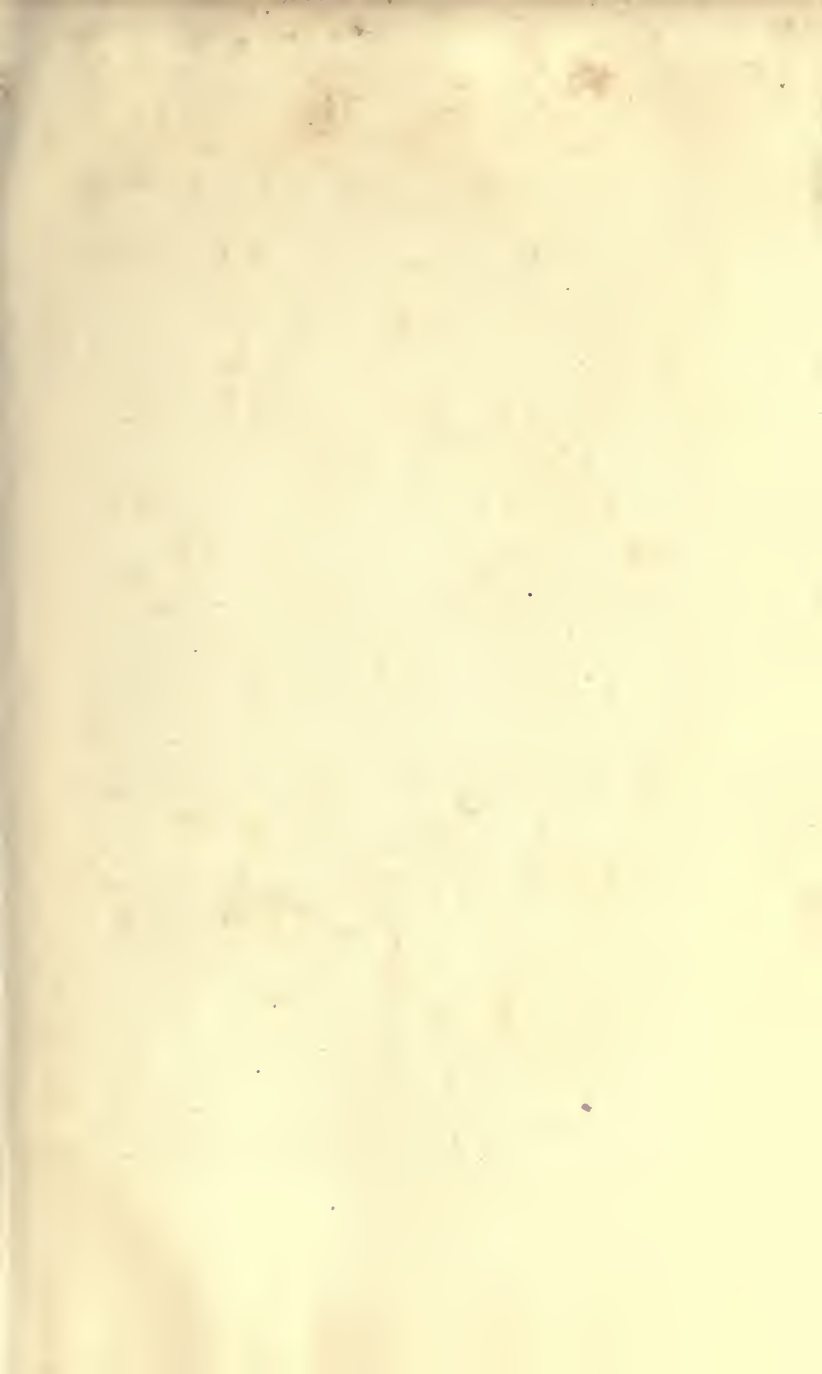
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THE WATCHER ON THE TOWER

A NOVEL

BY

A. G. HALES

AUTHOR OF "CAMPAIGN PICTURES" "DRISCOLL, KING OF SCOUTS"
'JAIR THE APOSTATE' "MULL-SKY" "ANGEL JIM"
ETC. ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY J. CHOENBERG

SECOND IMPRESSION



LONDON

F. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE, E.C.

He raised high his right arm
and cursed Prince Otto and
all his house. (Page 28.)



The first high bow sign
and cursed Prince Otto and
all his losses. (Page 28)

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LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE, E.C.

1904

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DEDICATION

*In affectionate memory of years of unflagging help through storm
and sunshine this book is dedicated to my comrade and wife*

EMMALINE HALES

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THE WATCHER ON THE TOWER



CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGE OF SVIR

AT the foot of the Valdai Hills lay the village of Svir. In the distance the outline of the banks of the river Tver could be discerned, but the Tver was frozen and lay like a curving sheet of glass under the cold grey Russian sky. Behind the village rose the black forbidding hills, black with dense timber that even the ever-falling snow could not lighten. In front, stretching so far away in the distance that the eye could scarce tell where trees commenced or ended, lay the great black pine forest of Sukhona, flaked here and there with patches of snow. Between the village and the forest lay the scanty fields which did duty for cultivation in that part of Russia. The village itself was mean and paltry to the eye of anyone accustomed to the village life of softer climes, mean even though the soft white mantle of snow lay over all things, dressing the low roofs and the dirty walls of the houses with a beauty and splendour that nature's artist hand knows how to bestow. It was a mean

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village; the houses were low and rough; the architecture was primitive and common; there was no relieving trait of beauty, even rustic beauty, anywhere. In the most sordid English village the church will save the place from vulgarity by its beauty, by its perfection of architectural simplicity and grandeur. In France, the gardens, the dwellings, the general surroundings all speak of taste—peasant taste perhaps, but taste and sweetness. In Germany, the quaintness, the far-off old world touch, gives to the hovel a smack of beauty. But this Russian village had nothing to redeem it—nothing. It was sordid, mean, common, like a grey sky without a touch of colour, not even a black bank of clouds to lift it from dead dulness.

Here and there a peasant slouched about, clad for the most part in sheep-skins—dirty, unkempt, vile; low of brow, broad of shoulder, tall of stature, physically strong but mentally low as the cattle in the stables—a brutish breed, not fit to die for a great country or live for it: a pack of white savages, lower in the scale of humanity than many a black barbarian horde in warmer climes. There was a sullen savageness about these peasants that fitted in well with the lowering sky, the sombre forests, the frozen river, the bleak hills, and bare plains. The women were not so bad as the men—women never are, as a class; they are always a little higher than the men, a little less selfish, a little less animal in their aspirations and desires. Yes, the women of the village of Svir took some of the greyness out of the life of the place; not that they were beautiful or chaste, but rather because they were less ugly than the men, less immoral in ideas and acts.

Now and again another class of person, male or female, passed swiftly through or about Svir—Jews or Jewesses.

No need to ask their race or breeding ; their blood was written in their faces—the blood of the most marvellous race of people the world has known or probably ever will know—Jews, the servants of the world ; and the conquerors thereof—Jews.

They lent to the sordid village of Svir its one touch of dignity and beauty, and yet they added to its meanness. The touch of dignity was apparent in the persons of two old men who, though dressed in peasant garb, carried themselves like princes of the house of David ; they were but village-born Jews, and yet they could trace a pedigree so far back in an unbroken line that Europe's kings and nobles, by comparison, were but the mushroom growth of yesterday. Perhaps that is why the nobles half the world over hate the Jews ; they may rob them of their money and their estates ; they cannot rob the Jew of his pedigree, of his ancestry. The Christian points to Calvary, and sneers. The Jew points to the Creation, and smiles. He stands for the greatest and the grandest types of humanity, he is the echo also of the meanest. Why—because the Jew *is* humanity ; he goes on living when other types rise, fall, and fade. What rôle is there that the Jew has not filled ? He has been warrior, king, lawgiver, poet, usurer, serf, saviour, betrayer,—the Jew has touched all things, all types. The Jew in Svir was as the Jew is all the world over, some were noble by nature and by instinct, some were base. The Jewish women in Svir gave to the place its only touch of beauty, just as a brilliant scarlet geranium on the window-sill of a garret in a city's slum will lend a touch of loveliness to a spot that has nothing else in it but vileness. The Russian peasant women were coarse, hard of feature, harder of speech ; they had no poetic instincts, no traditions ; even the act of maternity to them was a

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mere animal fact, an episode which had no significance beyond its pains and penalties. To them a man child was a man child and nothing more, except one more hungry mouth to fill.

To the Jewess a man child might mean a prince of the house of Israel, a prince in a peasant's sheep-skin. But what of that. They knew that David herded sheep on the hillsides. So the Jew and Jewess lived in the Russian village of Svir, and they were hated by the dull clods who surrounded them.

The Jewish men were hated because they possessed the gift of intellect above their neighbours, and because they walked as men walk who have a purpose in life, and likewise because they stood aloof from their Russian neighbours in matters of religion; they meddled not with politics nor with rival factions, but bent all their energies to the amassing of money; for the Russian Jew knew that money means power. The Jewish women were hated by their Russian neighbours, because, in spite of their physical charms, they were never unchaste.

The Russian women sneered at them, talked of their hawk eyes, eyes that sparkled and flashed with the fire that comes from blood that has not been mixed with the muddy dregs of common people. They pointed to the rich red lips that were indicative of passion, of Eastern sensuousness; lips sweet as the combs of wild honey; lips hot as passion flowers dried beneath a Syrian sun, yet moist with the life blood of perfect health. They sneered at the superb symmetry of the Jewish women, at the nobly rounded limbs, at the white teeth, at the full bosoms, at the arched insteps, at the white high foreheads and dark shapely brows; sneered and talked of the lust and lawlessness they vowed was rampant amongst the Hebrews—a cheap sneer, for no Russian ever knew a Jewess to be

unchaste ; they could not point to one Jewish woman who of her own free will lived an immoral life, though now and again, in the history of the race, they well knew that some beautiful daughter of the chosen people had fallen by force into the power of Russian nobles. Yes ; the slow, heavy, sluggish-blooded peasant men and women of Svir jibed openly at the Jewesses, because of their personal charms, not knowing that thousands of years of careful mating had made the women of that race what they were and are, and will be for ages. The Jews were hated in Svir ; they were a people of a higher order of intelligence than the people of the soil. They had been ground down and trampled upon a hundred times ; their property had been filched from them under every kind of pretext ; they had been denied all kinds of civil and military rights ; and yet they had flourished and waxed fat in this world's goods. Where they had the power to be hard they were hard—that is only human ; they had been buffeted about from pillar to post ; and the Jew's law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, which existed in the days of Moses, always lives with the Jew. It lives with the Gentile too, but the Gentile is too hypocritical to own up to it. The Gentile throws a mantle of Christian charity over his shoulders, but he keeps the hem of the garment close to his hand so that he can lift it to strike an enemy when his chance comes. The chief man amongst the Hebrews of Svir was the Rabbi Eli Strassgood, a tall old man, with a beard that often caught in his girdle when he tightened his sheep-skin coat. His beard was as white as the winter's snow, and his hair was, if possible, whiter than his beard. A tall fine man, who looked what he was—the descendant of a race of great men, who had been rulers and leaders of people ages before the proudest Russian

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noble had emerged from his mixed Tartar and Mongolian savagery.

The persecutions that had dogged the footsteps of his people generation after generation had not tamed his courage, it had only tempered it as fire tempers the best steel. He had learnt to wait, to bear in patience all kinds of ignominy; even as a boy he had been renowned for his great calm strength of mind; as a mere lad he had patiently put up with insults and jibes from the clods amongst whom he lived, until the poor fools mistook his passive strength for poverty of physical courage. Until one wild winter's day, when the Russians were cowering in their homes listening to the yelling of the wolves that had come from the hills and the great black forest, and, maddened by famine, had dashed into the very streets of Svir and howled dismally around the dwellings. Then it was that Orpah Restock, the young blind Jewess, had foolishly ventured forth, and would have been torn to pieces and devoured on the very threshold of her own home, had not Eli Strassgood seized an axe, and, in spite of the odds against him, rushed forth to save the poor blind vestal. Small chance would she have had, or Eli either, had not the sight of his peril appealed to the dormant spirit of the Jewish youths of Svir, who, seeing the danger, armed themselves with the short-handled, heavy-bladed axes with which they hewed faggots, and, thus armed, sallied forth to fight the wolves in the snow-covered streets of the village. A bitter fight it was; for the big, lean, bony, grey brutes, ravening with hunger, which the scent of blood only stirred to greater ferocity, struggled like a legion of grey devils to get the upper hand. But the Hebrew youths, cheered on by the ringing voice of young Eli, fought as their forebears fought under Joshua, and drove the snarling brutes backward step by step,

until at last they fled in a body to the shelter of the hills.

For many a long day after that the Russian peasants forbore to taunt a Jewish boy in the streets of Svir, or to insult a Hebrew vestal in the market-place; but they hated them none the less. And the racial hate was never allowed to slumber, for the priests of the Greek Church fanned the flame by act, by look, and by speech. In due season Eli became the head of his people in Svir. When they quarrelled amongst themselves, as they often did, they brought the matter to him; and he sat in judgment, dealing out even-handed justice without favour, without fee or reward; and they, knowing him to be a wise and an upright man in whom their was no guile, bowed to his dictum, and did him honour in all things; for his life was blameless.

When the Jews were robbed by the minions of the Russian noble, in order that his gambling debts and his licentiousness might be paid for, it was always Eli who faced the Russian extortioners, and made matters as easy as possible for his own people. It made his heart bleed to pay away hard-earned silver and gold, to keep in luxury the wantons, the coarse common loves of the titled sensualist whose heel was upon his people; but he knew well that his people's time had not yet come, knew that for his generation there was nothing in Russia but suffering, robbery, contumely, and insult; yet he knew also that, in the end, the hand of the Jew would be upon the throat of the Russian, and an eye be rendered for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. He knew also that it would not come to pass in his time. But what is a lifetime to a man whose race has seen the world from the very cradle of time; a race whose sons and daughters saw Egypt rise and crumble, who saw Greece, mistress of the arts and sciences, sink into nothingness; a race who saw Rome's eagles

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overtop the world; and in a little time, time which passed like a summer's night, beheld Goths and Huns sacking the Empire, city; saw the barbarians of the world sporting insolently with the toys they made from Rome's proudest patrician dames and damsels.

The Jew, the despised Jew, saw the princes of Rome slaughtered like shambled sheep, or else led captive to be used as slaves by men whom they in their hour of pride would not have deigned to touch with the hem of their robes. To the Jew time is but a transient thing; a generation of humanity is but as a moth in the sunlight to a people who have lived on the breath of the ages; and in Svir the pride of race was strong in the Jews. They despised the Russians, and gave them hate for hate; good cause had they to hate the Muscovite! Many a man and woman, too, lived in that village who could remember the story of Naomi Ritzen, the lovely Jewess who chanced one day to fill the eye of a Russian prince as he rode through Svir. The prince had reined in his horse, a half-bred Tartar like himself; and had gazed into the face of Naomi with his evil eyes glowering savagely. She was not like other women, that beautiful daughter of Judah; she looked like an olive that had ripened on the hills of Lebanon. As the Russian looked at her his mouth grew dry, and the surly eyes grew heavier and heavier, with the fire of untrammelled lust. The maiden saw his gaze and fled homewards with swift feet. The next day, when doing an errand for her mother, she disappeared, and no Jew ever set eyes upon her again. Her people mourned for her as for one who dies in youth; and one more debt was written down against the oppressor—one debt amongst thousands; some of which have since been paid in full, others yet remain to be claimed when time and opportunity shall serve; for time is the Jew's weapon.

It may be blunt to-day, to-morrow it may be two-edged and keen; to-day it may be used against individuals, to-morrow against nations; for the Jew is a force that the world has always to reckon with—sometimes for good, sometimes for evil; but always a force to be felt. Of such mixed elements was the village of Svir composed of when this story had its birth.

CHAPTER II

THE HUNTING OF THE WOLF

OF all the haughty overbearing tyrants amongst the Russian nobility none were more oppressive, or cruel, or extortionate than Prince Gertshoff, son of that evil personage who had cast longing eyes upon the Jewish vestal, Naomi Ritzen.

At the time of our story he was in the full flower of his young manhood — tall, square-shouldered, athletic, coarse of feature, keen-brained, and savagely courageous. In him the Tartar blood seemed to run riot; in temper he was cold and stern, until roused; but once roused he became a very whirlwind of passion. At such moments he swept every impediment from his path with brutal power; for Prince Gertshoff was a law unto himself. His father had been a bad man, a cruel man, an oppressor of the poor; woe to the damsel of the poorer classes, whether Jewish or Russian, who found favour in his eyes; for to him a poor damsel was of no more account than any other chattel in his dominions; but, hard as he was, he lacked the cruel ferocity of his son, Prince Otto. The poor, both Jew and Gentile, had thanked God in secret when the old prince died; but they lived, many of them, to mourn his death. "He was an old grey wolf," said Paul, the innkeeper, "but his son is a grey devil; he has no laughter in his

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blood." This he said in a whisper, sitting by his own fireside, yet, when he met Prince Otto, none smiled more obsequiously, none fawned or cringed more abjectly than Paul the innkeeper; and yet he and his had good cause to hate Prince Otto. He had a daughter, this seller of vodka—an only child, the apple of his eye, a buxom, red-cheeked lass, bright of eye and light of heart. One day when Prince Otto was passing through the village with a friend who had come down with him from Moscow, the friend had seen the innkeeper's child, and she had pleased him. He spoke lightly and laughingly of her to Prince Otto, and the prince, turning to the innkeeper, had ordered him to send his daughter up to the castle. He gave the order just as if he had been speaking of a dog. Paul had fallen at his feet and grovelled, so had the girl's mother; but they had grovelled in vain. That visit to the castle meant the slaying of a young girl's soul. So the innkeeper fawned when he met the prince, and called upon his God to shower down blessings on the noble's head; but often in the winter time he would lie awake and curse, and wish the wolves might get Prince Otto, and pick his bones clean, as they often did to travellers. Paul the innkeeper mourned for his child's blighted life, and yet none had laughed louder than he when Prince Otto's father had spirited away Naomi, the Jewish vestal, who had nobler blood in her veins than any noble in all Russia. Paul the innkeeper hated his daughter's child; his wife hated it also; yet, before it could fairly toddle across the road, they had taught it to fling jibes at the children of the Jews; yet neither he nor his wife could have told why they did so. Prince Otto was in his castle that frowned down upon Svir; he had arrived from Moscow with a number of his friends, and word had gone round from house to

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house that it would be as well for those who had comely wives and daughters to keep them out of sight, for the friends of the prince were apt to take full advantage of the licence the prince permitted. There were sullen faces amongst the Russians, and aching hearts amongst the Jews. To those latter people it was a time for fasting and prayer, not for feasting and merry-making, a time for the sprinkling of ashes on the glossy hair, not for the braiding of tresses. Only the aged and the ill-favoured ventured out of doors; the young and the comely kept within the shelter of the homes. But that stratagem was useless, because Prince Otto knew the ways of the Jews just as he knew the habits of his own people. On the fourth morning after the arrival of the party at the castle, the servants of the prince announced that there was to be a grand wolf hunt, for the sport of the nobles and gentry, and that every able-bodied man and youth in Svir would be required to act as beaters and carriers to the noble sportsmen. When that news reached the Hebrew quarters of Svir, a great dread fell upon the people, for well they knew what might come to pass in the absence of the men. The vestals shrank closer to their mothers, with wild frightened eyes, and whitened cheeks; and mothers clung to maidens with fierce wild love and anger seething in their hearts. Old men bent their beards on to their shrunken breasts and murmured prayers to Israel's God. Well might the old pray, for they had need of prayer. The young men clenched their hands, and bent their brows; whilst more than one stepped to the corner by the fireside and drew forth the short-handled, heavy-bladed axe; and the mothers looking at them did not say nay.

The moment was magnetic. Had a young David arisen then to lead them, the Jewish youth of Svir

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would have made history. From door to door the evil tidings flew, kinsmen spoke to kinsmen, neighbour to neighbour. Then all at once arose from every home arose the bitter cry—

“How long, O Lord, how long!”

And the grey sky changed not its greyness, the heavens were unmoved—

“How long, O Lord, how long!”

Again and again the Hebrews spoke to the skies as cattle call when the streams are dry and the parched earth refuses to give them herbage or moisture. As the cattle raise their great soft eyes to the arch of heaven when the drought eats into their vitals, as the poor tortured brutes cry aloud for relief, so did the Hebrews—and they called in vain. The hour either for deliverance or for vengeance had not arrived; the cup was not yet full. In that hour of mental torture it was the patriarch Eli who advised them.

“Be patient and be strong,” he said.

Then the mothers clustered round him, and spoke as only mothers can speak. “We have been patient, we have been strong, Eli; but our daughters, our vestals, are they to be torn from us, to be the sport of these men whose very touch means pollution to a daughter of Israel.”

“Be patient and be strong,” he counselled; “let the young men go forth as if they dreamt of no wrong; let them be foremost in the hunting of the wolves. Let them show to Prince Otto and his friends that the Jewish men are not afraid of danger; let them shame these Russians by the very boldness of their deeds; and it may come to pass that by their courage they may redeem their sisters; for courage is the only virtue that Prince Otto of Svir understands or appreciates. Let no man spare himself; let this be a time to be remembered in Russia when the world is old; let each man

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take the axe which is used for the hewing of faggots, and bear himself like a warrior."

"And our daughters, our vestals, what of them, Eli?" cried the mothers.

The old man drew himself up to his towering height, his hair and beard floating about him like the spray of the sea; his hands were raised far over his head, he looked like some prophet of the olden time. "Our daughters are in the hands of our God, and He will deliver them."

In the Russian homes there was consternation and bitter wrath, deep, black, sullen wrath. But the people had no past; they had not been evolved out of the centuries, they had no Babylon to look back upon and remember. The Russian turned his eyes to the earth, and said, "The Czar is afar off." The Jews looked to the stars, and cried, "Our God is near us; He will not let us be utterly undone."

The day following, the party from the castle came down through the village in their sleighs; quaint and curious were the designs of the sleighs; some were fashioned like swans, the inside lined with furs, others were made like boats. The chief huntsman had one made like a horse without legs. The prince's sleigh was made to carry only himself and his driver, and was shaped like a boar; some were drawn by two horses, some by three, and all the horses were of the fierce stock that roam the steppes. The men were armed according to their fancy; most of the nobles carried muskets; but all had the short, broad-bladed, stabbing spear, or the great Danish axe, which lingers yet in far out-of-the-way places, where civilisation moves slowly. The peasants had whatever weapons they could lay hands upon. It was not hard to tell the Jews from the Russians, even though all of the lower class were dressed precisely alike. The Jews were

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taller and slimmer of figure, and moved with the quick, graceful movements that are natural to most active men. If looks went for anything, the Jews could have more than held their own with the Russians in a hand-to-hand encounter. Yet every menial task was assigned to the Hebrews; and, when they were spoken to, they were addressed as if they were dogs fresh from the kennels; no one thought of them or treated them as human beings.

More than once, when a Hebrew youth got in the way of the horses, even for a moment, the driver's heavy-thonged whip would fall with savage force upon the body of the offender; and the wanton cruelty of the drivers brought nothing from the nobles but an idle laugh or coarse jest. So the procession went upon its way, the peasants trotting along beside the sleighs, the stainless snow beneath their feet, the grey sky overhead, and the grim forest in front of them. When they arrived at the edge of the frowning pines, the nobles split up, each man leaving his sleigh, and, with a few attendants, pushing in amidst the shadows. Outside in the clearing the day was dull and drear enough, but in there, amidst those pines, it was little better than twilight. At first there was no adventure, for the wolves were scared by the number and the noise; but, as the party broke up, and scattered far and near in little groups, the famished wolves, prowling in packs, grew bolder, and began to close in upon the sportsmen, and many a desperate encounter took place within the circle of the woods. Prince Otto, as reckless in sport as he was ruthless in love, had pushed boldly into a black gorge formed by a division of a line of hills. In the summer-time a narrow stream ran down the middle of this ravine, but it was frozen over now. On the slope of the hills the trees grew so thickly that their

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tops, meeting above the stream, almost shut out the daylight. It was a spot a wise man would have shunned. But Prince Otto was not a wise man; he was recklessly brave, and absurdly proud of his strength and activity. He had ventured into that ravine simply because he knew few other men would have dared to do so. The Russian peasants who were attending him hung back dismayed; but the Jewish youth pressed eagerly in with him, and in a moment the place was alive with snarlings and howls and the sound of gnashing teeth. From between every couple of trees fierce red eyes blazed through the semi-darkness. The reek of foul breath tainted the pure air; the grey devils howled to one another; then they all howled in concert; then, as if the last long-drawn howl was a preconcerted signal, the pack charged in, and the fight commenced in bitter earnest. Prince Otto, with his big ungainly feet braced deeply in the snow, gripping his heavy-hafted hunting-spear in both his sinewy hands, met the first shock; lunging, thrusting, stabbing, he fought like a man. He was at his best then, a semi-savage in a savage game of slaughter, his life depending upon his nerve and prowess. Never once did he flinch; he was bred the wrong way to know fear. But his courage and his strength would have availed him little in that desperate hour if it had not been for the Jewish youths who fought around him. Again and again the wolves broke through the circle, again and again they would have pulled him down had it not been for the Hebrew band; clutching their axes, they threw themselves into the fight with all the valour of desperate men. Sometimes a smothered shriek or a gurgling cry would tell where a wolf had buried its poisonous fangs in a man's throat; still the Jews fought on, until even Prince Otto wondered at the

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splendid courage of the men who surrounded him and saved him from death. For a moment or two something akin to chivalry awoke within him, and he knew that the people he had despised and wronged were brave men, worthy of a better fate than that which came to the Hebrews in Russia. He faced around then, and gave the word to fight their way out of the ravine, if fight they could. He did not shun his share of the peril, rather did he court danger; but, no matter which way he turned, he found a Hebrew lad standing between him and death. So grimly, slowly, the little band fought their way out into the more open forest, and the worst of the peril was done with. Even then it might have gone hard with Prince Otto, if the quick wits of his Hebrew escort had not seen the way to avert the danger; for by this time the forest seemed alive with wolves, leaping, howling, creeping, gnashing their fangs, darting here and there, in and out, tearing at each other in mad wrath. But the Hebrew lads tore faggots from the pine boughs, and lit the forest with red flame; and so, ringed around with fire and steel, Prince Otto, bleeding from more than one wound, made his way back to the spot where he had left his sleigh, and there he found most of his Russian servants cowering fearfully, for they had fled when the wolf pack closed in on the prince in the ravine. He strode up to Paul the innkeeper, and with his clenched hand struck him in the face; then, taking the thong from the driver of the sleigh, he flogged them one by one whilst they grovelled in the snow; and not one was man enough to strike him back with either hand or weapon. And the Hebrews stood by and made no sign. But the peasants hated them worse than they had ever hated Prince Otto; hated them worse than they had ever hated them, because

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of the courage they had displayed in a time of danger, and because the Jews were witness to their humiliation. When Prince Otto sprang into his sleigh and drove furiously off, the peasants would have wreaked their vengeance upon the Hebrews; but they, hot with the fierce struggle through which they had just passed, formed themselves into a compact body, and gripped their axes so menacingly that the sullen brood around them dared do nothing but jibe, and the jibes hurt no man. The old fighting spirit of the race, which had lain dormant for generations, had been aroused, and they who had walked so humbly of old time, with heads bent and downcast eyes, fearful of giving offence, now stepped out boldly, with squared shoulders and free swinging stride, for they doubted not that Prince Otto would remember their doings of that day; for it had long been his boast that physical courage in man, and physical beauty in women, were worth all else on earth. To him, half-barbarian, half-civilised sensualist, moral courage and moral worth were of no account; intellectual excellence, except when used for the planning of warlike schemes, did not appeal to him. The shrewd cunning of a common hunter was of more worth in his eyes than the trained intelligence of a philosopher or poet; and yet he was not devoid of a certain rough shrewdness himself.

Once a very great artist had been showing him a masterpiece, a tiny painting representing a glen with a rivulet in the very act of freezing. It was one of those rare gems of art which comes into the world at long intervals. Every touch on the canvas was true to nature; one could almost see the forest branches quiver with the cold wind, and the ice knit in the embrace of the frost king.

"How long did it take you to do this?" the prince had asked.

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And the artist replied, "How long? Oh, a few hours of actual work; but it was the outcome of a lifetime of toil and study, the apex of a generation of climbing."

"How long will it live?" asked Prince Otto.

"Live? Ah, it will live as long as canvas will endure."

The prince took the artist by the arm, and led him to the window. Pointing to just such a spot as the great painter had put upon canvas, he said, "That is more beautiful than your picture, and that was there when I was born. I played there when I was a child; it was there when my great-grandfather was born; it will be there when my great-grandson comes to fill my place. What is the use of all your art, when I can step out of my window any day in the year, and see things more beautiful than anything you artists can paint?"

CHAPTER III

THE HOMECOMING

IN the village of Svir the dogs were barking as the shadows fell, the grey black shadows which herald the meeting of night and snow. Lights were burning in most of the homes, and the red lights cast a pink glow on the carpet of silvery white. It was beginning to freeze again, even harder than it had done upon the previous day; a low whispering wind crept drearily round the houses, and the wind if possible was colder than the gathering icicles; even the rough dogs, bred to hardship, cowered before the advance of that stealthy wind which cut through hide and hair, and made even canine life a burden unbearable. The sleighs of the nobles dashed through the village, and with jingling bells made their way to the old rude-looking castle that stood perched on a low hill, like some old vulture, mateless and savage. Now and again a burst of laughter, or the line of a hunting song, or a shout broke from the band; little else was heard except the spsh-spsh-spsh of the horse's hoofs in the snow. Then for a little space of time quietness reigned, and the shadows grew deeper; yet the Jewish women in their homes cowered low and trembled, for it was at the fall of the night that their homes would be invaded by the servants from the castle, if any outrage was intended. Eagerly

they strained their ears to catch the sounds of the men-folk returning on foot from the hunt; every sound that reached their ears sent a thrill of dread through their hearts. The old women prayed, the young ones wept and shivered, for none knew what an hour might bring forth.

In one home a matron lay with her half-hour-old babe dead against her breast; she was the mother of the fairest daughter of her race in Svir, a fifteen-year-old damsel, whose face was like the face of the lost Naomi. The dread, the shame, the fear of what might come, had brought the mother to her evil hour before her time; and her babe, her first man child, had been born dead. In another Jewish home an old man lay with the dews of death gathering upon his face, a noble-looking old man, whose presence would have lent dignity to any chamber in the dwellings of the great; and yet he did not look out of keeping with his humble room, for true dignity is always shrined in a simple casket. His family were round him waiting for his blessing, all but the three young men who were his grandsons; they were away with the hunting party. The women sorrowed as women will, and yet even in that hour they strained their ears for the sound of the ravishers' footsteps. The patriarch read their thoughts from their faces, and, raising himself to a sitting posture in his bed, he poured forth his soul in praise of Israel's God. It was the triumph of mind over material forces. "Since the world began, our people have been in the lap of the Creator. The heavens are His watch-tower, and the Eternal Watcher never wearies. O daughters of Israel, if thy days are spent in bondage, if thy bodies are defiled by the bond-master, keep thy souls pure, and in the darkest hour look upward, for the Watcher is on the tower."

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The voice that for a moment had rung out strident, forceful, raucous in the intensity of its passion, died away to a sibilant whisper, then ceased. The flashing eyes grew dull, the firm mouth slackened, the squared shoulders shrank together. The patriarch sat in the midst of his kin, sat there dead; and, at that moment, the sound the women had strained their ears to catch, the sound that sickened their souls, disturbed the mourners—a rude, rough summons, a harsh knocking upon the outer door, a demand for instant admittance. Not in that home alone, but in a dozen other Jewish homes, the sound was heard; wherever there dwelt a damsel of uncommon comeliness, the servants from the castle were demanding admittance. Oh, what a scene was there! The vestals cowering low, the old men pouring forth curses, the mothers frantic with anguish. Still the rude knockings continued, doors were burst in, filthy jibes and insulting laughter mingled with the screams of women. From every home where lived a Hebrew the people poured forth; dogs rushed from outhouses and kennels, and yelped and barked; feeble old men rent their clothes, and women tore their hair. Then, high above the babel, rose the piercing voice of Eli Strassgood, "O daughters of Israel, the Watcher on the tower never wearies."

It was a strange cry at such a time, in such a place, amidst such a scene. For a moment the babel ceased, then it broke out afresh as a ruffian peasant, in the livery of the castle, began to drag away the fifteen-year-old Naomi. The vestal lifted up her voice, and sent the world-old cry of "Mother!" ringing afar; and at that cry her mother, with her dead babe in her arms, leapt from her couch of pain, and, dashing through the throng, her poor bare feet treading the biting snow, her breasts bare to the winter's

wind, seized the peasant by the beard and dashed him backwards; then, thrusting the still figure of her dead babe into the man's arms, she shrieked, "Take my child, my dead man child, to Prince Otto, and tell him the deeds of this hour shall haunt his race for ever; take it, and begone, but leave me my daughter."

For a little space of time the serfs were cowed, but their brutish natures were not deeply touched. Savagely they turned upon the women, and the struggle began anew; and some brute, more inhuman than his fellows, set a torch to one of the Jewish homes, and the leaping flames lit up the scene of outrage and of wrong. The young Naomi, in spite of her mother's wild attempt to save her, was thrown like a sack of meal across a peasant's shoulder; he threw the frantic mother from him, and kicked the dead child from his path. Then a strong, lean hand took him by the beard, a woodman's axe gleamed a moment in the firelight above his head—then it fell; and Naomi's father had avenged his ravished home. Wild cries rose up on every hand; the Jewish youth, returning from the hunting, burst through all that opposed them, and, axe in hand, cleared the streets of the village of Svir of the hirelings of Prince Otto.

In the grey castle all was merriment and feasting. The prince drank deeply, partly to hide his wrath, which had been kindled by the cowardice of his peasants, and partly to keep pace with his guests, for it was the custom to drink long and recklessly when such guests met in out-of-the-way places like Svir. All the prince's entertainments were conducted upon a scale of rude splendour. A kind of rough princeliness pervaded everything. Even when in Moscow he placed but little restraint upon himself; but in

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his own dominions he let his lawlessness run untrammelled. The feast was at its height, when a servitor made his way to him, and told him that the Jews had risen in revolt, and had slain some of his servants. It was a garbled tale that the man told, cunningly mixed with threats against the house and person of the prince himself.

The news soon spread amongst the guests, most of whom were half-drunk, and ripe for any evil thing. "Let us go down, Prince Otto, and tame these Hebrew dogs," they cried; and Prince Otto laughed his cold, cruel laugh, and said, "Yes, we will go down and tame them!"

There was no thought of sleep in the Jewish quarter of Svir; men and women looked gloomily one at the other, and then turned their eyes with sickening dread upon their little children, for they knew the length of Prince Otto's arm, and, knowing it, trembled. And yet they did not regret the doings of the night. They knew they had stood between the women of their race and the last shame, and that knowledge carried balm with it, the balm that soothes even death. At length, in Eli Strassgood's house, arose a chant—a deep, full, solemn chant, a psalm of David; and in each home the watchers took it up, and the wind wafted it along—a wistful, weird sound, that cut the stillness of the winter's night into fantastic echoes. Prince Otto smiled through his frost-stiffened beard as he heard it, as he marched swiftly upon his victims at the head of his party of marauders. "It is the last song of the Hebrews in Svir," he said to his nearest follower. He had waited for a suitable pretext for years to drive the Jews forth and spoil them before they went, and his task pleased him.

"Bring the dogs out into the starlight," he said

curtly to one of his men; "either that or they burn in their own homes!"

At the first summons Eli Strassgood came out of his home, and the people, old and young, flocked round him, whispering to him to advise them what to do. "Peace!" he said—"The Watcher on the tower never wearies."

His faith in his God was as unalterable as fate. He left his people, and, moving to where Prince Otto stood leaning upon his hunting-spear, he prostrated himself in all humility, and asked for "Justice for the Jews."

"Justice for the Jews!" A great laugh rang out from the ranks of the nobles. "The knout for the Jews!" cried one, and struck the old man across the cheek with the dreaded weapon of shame and torture. So cruel was the blow, that the blood gushed from the torn cheek and ran down into the white beard.

Eli clenched his teeth to choke the moan of anguish that came throbbing from his very heart. "Justice for the Jews," he said calmly, "for the Jew, who stood by thy side, O Prince, when thy peasants left thee to the mercy of the wolves."

A red flush of anger swept across the face of Prince Otto. "Justice for the Jew, old man," he cried; "aye, and justice for the Russian, too; justice for the killing of my servants!"

"They killed to save their daughters from violence and shame, Prince; would any man do less?"

"They shall pay the price, the full price, to the uttermost farthing."

"Mercy, O Prince?"

"You asked for justice, not mercy."

"I was wrong," cried the old Hebrew bitterly; "I

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should not have asked for justice from a Russian for a Jew. I ask for mercy.”

“You shall pay the price.”

“What is the price?”

“Life for life.”

A wail rose from the Jews, a cry of despair.

“Three of my servants have been killed; many have been maimed; my name and my father’s name have been reviled; my goods and chattels have been destroyed, and my will defied here, in my own village of Svir. This hour is the last that a Jew shall spend alive in Svir; your gold and silver, and all that you possess, are forfeit.”

Old Eli straightened himself like a bow suddenly unbent. “One life I have, Prince Otto, and I will give it willingly.”

“One,” said the prince; “where are the other two?”

A man in the prime of his life—a fine, stalwart man—stepped from the ranks of the Jews, and stood beside old Eli.

It was Nathan Rinzen, the father of the vestal Naomi. “I am another, O Prince; if blood cries for blood, take mine.”

The cold, brutal face of the great noble hardened like hot iron cooling. “It is well,” he said. “Where is the third?”

“Here,” shrieked a woman’s voice; “here is the third, O accursed one”; and Nathan Rinzen’s wife, now crazed with grief, dressed only in her robes of sickness, darted through the crowd and laid her dead babe at the feet of the prince; then she threw back her head, until her long, black hair fell down her back in a wild wave, threw back her head and laughed—a low, rich gurgling laugh, that came from the fulness of her round throat. Hardened as he was, the prince could not repress a movement of

horror; then his native savageness came uppermost, and he spurned the dead babe from him. At that deed the mad woman darted at him like an eagle, clutching at his throat with both her bared hands, until he hurled her aside, and shouted to his serfs to fire the Jewish homes and drive the Jews forth into the night.

Then began a scene that devils must have chuckled over. The homes of the Jews were plundered; sick men and women were thrown from their beds into the night, in order that the bedding might be searched for hidden treasure; floors were dug up, walls were broken down; every secret or sacred place in every home was vandalised, in the gross search for wealth. And when the spoliation was complete, when every nook and cranny had been investigated, torches were applied to the homes, and the Jewish quarters in Svir were soon blazing fiercely, the great red waves of flame painting the world's white carpet of snow with a blush of pink. The Russians moved from spot to spot, flitting in and out amidst smoke and flame like devils glorying in the task of destruction.

The Hebrews huddled together like a flock of sheep, gazed upon the awful scene in silent horror. Had the men been alone, they might have dashed upon the Russian spoilers and died fighting for vengeance, and so have taught the Muscovites a lesson which years would not obliterate; but they had women and children, old men, and sick folk with them; and nothing so chills the blood of manhood as the sight of woman's helplessness. So they waited, and none spoke save Eli only, and he, with his mighty faith in his God unshaken, whispered from time to time—"The Watcher on the tower never wearies."

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At last the flames died down, the poor walls crumbled apart, and the roofs fell crashing inwards, throwing the sparks upwards in showers. Then Prince Otto called Eli to him. Pointing to the glowing ashes, he said, "Part of the debt is paid, Jew; do you know of any hidden treasures?" And Eli made answer, saying, "All that we had you have taken; now take my life, and let these people be held blameless."

"Jew," came the fierce, harsh answer, "Jew, the people shall not be held blameless; they shall be driven into the forest, and death, or worse, shall fall to the lot of either man or woman who turns back towards Svir."

"To the forest!" cried Eli, aghast at the awful sentence, "to the forest, Prince?" The forest is full of wolves, fierce with the famine of midwinter; my people are unarmed and unprepared with food, not even food for one meal have they between them. Some are old and weak, some are young and feeble, some carry babes at the breast, some—O God of Israel—some are with child; would you send them out to die the death?"

"If they live or die, Jew, it is no concern of mine; to the forests they go." Then, with a bitter sneer, he taunted Eli, saying, "Only a minute back I heard you say to your people, 'The Watcher on the tower never wearies'; but he slumbers now, Jew, slumbers—and your sands are run."

At that word, Eli, the descendant of a race of prophets, dashed the hands of his guards from his shoulders, and, lifting high his right arm, he cursed Prince Otto and all his house. "My death or my life matters nothing; it is but the shifting of the sands a little quicker, or a little slower, and nothing matters. The destruction of these innocent ones will call for

vengeance, and vengeance will come in due season, as surely as the spring will follow the winter. But the reviling of the living God is another matter; and as my soul liveth, Otto, Prince of Svir, the day will come when all this countryside will remember my words and tremble. As for thee, thou man of blood, thou man without pity for the weak and down-trodden, thy life shall be a weariness to thee, and thou shalt go through the land a thing accursed; and thou shalt long for death as a bridegroom longs for his bride, but it shall not come to thee." Then, turning to his people, he cried, in a voice from which all traces of age or weakness had vanished, "Farewell, O Israel, farewell; go forth from this place, for it is accursed; better the jaws of the wolves than the shelter of these men, for the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Farewell, O Israel; and remember in light or darkness, in joy or despair, in life or death, 'The Watcher on the tower never wearies.'"

The Hebrews, without food, without even staves in their hands to protect them, struggled off to the great, black, forbidding pine forest, the young helping the old, the strong carrying the weak, the bold comforting the timid—marching out from the haunts of savage, sullen, brutish, greedy men, on to the haunts of fierce, hungry, ravening beasts. As they marched they could hear the cruel exultant yells of their human foes behind them, and the far-reaching howls of the brutes in front of them; and in that hour of bitter terror the spirits of the Jews rose equal to the dangers, and they marched as the men and women of their race had so often marched during the changing fortunes of the ages, with bold blood running like warm wine through their veins, and the words of their prophet ringing

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in their ears. When the rest of the Hebrews had gone, the Russian peasants fell upon Eli and Nathan Rinzen; and with pieces of stone, pulled from the walls of the Jewish homes, they stoned them to death; then they dragged the bodies to the outskirts of the village and cast them into a field, and piled stones on top of them, little dreaming that a day would come when on that very spot, an eye should be demanded for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE FOREST

IT was dawn when the Hebrew band reached the forest of Sukhona, the cold pitiless dawn of a mid-winter's day in Russia—the first day of their exile from their homes. As they pushed through the outer fringe of the forest, they broke into a wild chant, in order that the volume of sound might scare the wolves away. Then the younger men, going in groups, tore down faggots and made torches; they dared not move singly a dozen paces from the band for fear of the wolves. Great packs of these gaunt brutes hung round them, fighting amongst themselves, tainting the pure morning air with the foetid vapours they exhaled as they howled and fought. The women and children carried the torches which lit the sombre forest with an unearthly glow, whilst the men armed themselves with knotted branches which they had improvised as clubs. Later on, when time and opportunity served, they sharpened the ends of tough, straight boughs, and made for themselves rude spears, hardening the sharpened points in the embers of fires. A lesser breed of men would have succumbed to the initial trials of that fearful march; but the ages of hardship and persecution through which the Jews had passed, since Jerusalem fell into an invader's hands,

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had stored in their blood a readiness of resource in danger, and a keenness of perception not often met with amongst the sons of new-born nations.

They were not cowed by the dangers that lay in their path, though, when they had been allowed to live at peace in the Russian village, they had always avoided danger in every possible way, until their extreme caution almost convicted them of cowardice.

That caution was incidental to their breeding. Men whose forebears had been hounded through Asia, and harried through Europe, generation after generation, had transmitted all the elements of caution to their descendants, just as surely as a racing horse transmits a racing strain. It could not possibly have been otherwise; and it was well for those men and women that they had inherited sound frames, quick brains, strong arms, and stout hearts, for never did exiles need those qualities more. They had to dig for roots on which to exist, as they forced a passage towards Navagod, a village that lay far away on the other side of the forest in whose bowels they had buried themselves. One by one, the very little children died, and were consigned to the lap of the frozen earth; one by one, the old men and women were gathered to their fathers, and were laid to rest.

Now and again some savage prowler of the forest tore down some adventurous youth who ventured from the band. Hunger, cold, sickness, and the perils of the way thinned the ranks of the Hebrews, until but few were left of those who had been exiled from Svir.

Amongst the few who bore up most bravely was the grand-niece of Eli Strassgood, who had been wedded to a man of the house of David, a Jewish peasant with the blood of a great king—ay, many great kings—in his veins; if long and unbroken de-

scent can make a man noble, this Hebrew should have ranked with the great ones of the earth. A noble man he was, simply and unostentatiously he had lived, boldly and manfully he had died, and his sepulchre had been the lean jaws of the all-devouring beasts that slew him when he had rushed to the defence of a careless youth who had strayed into peril. Laban Gotschalk had been his name; and when he died he left no heir to his name, for his young wife had not then reached maternity. But her time came at last, and in a cattle-shed attached to a ruined dwelling, that stood by a narrow road that skirted the forest of Sukhona, she had given birth to a boy, a beautiful boy, fit to gladden any mother's heart. When they told her it was a man child she had turned her eyes to the heavens and said meekly, "Now, indeed, mayest thy handmaiden depart in peace."

She had struggled on with a broken heart after the death of her husband; gladly would she have laid life's burden down when she knew that she was widowed; but well she knew that it was her duty to the dead and to her people to fight against despair until her babe was born, in the hope that the fruit of her marriage might be a man child, and her husband's line be not broken; when that was accomplished her mission was ended. In vain her kinsfolk bade her be of good cheer, pointing out that the forest and its perils now lay behind them and the more hospitable plains in front; vainly they spoke to her of her duty to the child she had borne.

"I have given a man child to the world, his God will guard him, for the Watcher on the tower never wearies."

How true her words were. She had turned her face to the wall; already the tiny fingers of her

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firstborn were beginning to lose their power to thrill, when out of the distance came the tramp of horses' feet. The little band of exiles clustered round the shed, and waited to see what manner of men the fates were sending them; they waited in gnawing anxiety, for they knew not what report had been circulated concerning them, and the reason of their expulsion from Svir. It might be a tale of murder, witchcraft, extortion, robbery, or the desecration of Christians' graves,—all these charges were laid at the doors of Jews, when avarice wanted a pretext for plunder, or ignorance a pretence for persecution.

The travellers came on slowly, four in number; one man, evidently the leader, rode a half horse-length in front of a tall angular personage, who seemed from his dress and bearing to be a sort of body-servant or guard. The other two were simply Russian soldiers, and rode knee to knee, a good spear's-length behind the second man. As the leader's horse came abreast of the cattle-shed, the rider's eyes glanced with piercing interest at the Hebrew group; then he drew rein and, speaking in a foreign tongue, made some remark to his near neighbour, which none of the Hebrews could understand, for none knew his tongue. Apparently he got no satisfaction from his henchman, for, indicating the exiles with a wave of his arm, he asked one of the Cossacks, in excellent Russian, who the people were, and what was the meaning of their presence in such an unlooked-for place.

The soldier replied stolidly that he did not know, and could not understand the presence of the wanderers; but, he added with a grin, as he dropped his lance point to the level of a footman's shoulders, "We will soon make the dogs talk."

At that, one of the Hebrews stepping forward,

and making due obeisance to the leader, said, "We are a band of poor Jews, Excellency."

"Jews," said the stranger, and a sneer ran round his scornful mouth; "by my soul, there are Jews everywhere." Then noting their rude weapons and their bold pose, he said, "It seems to me that you are not as others of your people I have met." Then, as if some half-forgotten story had just flashed through his mind, he queried sharply, "Are you the Jews of Svir?"

The man who acted as the mouthpiece of the Israelites replied, humbly enough, "We are all that is left of the Jews of Svir, Excellency; some have fallen by famine, some by the hand of God, and some by the jaws of wild beasts; we be but a remnant now."

"You are few, but you will be fewer if Prince Otto of Svir or any of his people come upon you; why do you linger by the way?"

They told him why, simply, and without seeming to note the tragedy in their story. He listened to them with a look of intense interest dawning upon his face; then, when they had ceased speaking, he sat sideways in his saddle, musing on what he had heard for many minutes. Now and again he smiled, and anon a frown would knit his strong brow into rugged lines; whatever his thoughts, he made up his mind at last. "Take those soldiers on with you, Wyatt, and keep them a hundred paces from this hovel till I call you," he said in English.

The man called Wyatt saluted like an old soldier, and, beckoning the two Cossacks to follow him, walked his horse off; and the leader of the party, dismounting, gave his bridle rein to a Jew, and entered the shed where the mother and the young child lay; and the Hebrews thronged around him, for their native intelli-

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gence told them that he was no enemy—whether he would prove a friend or not, only the future could decide. He looked at the mother, and saw that she was dying; he looked at the babe, and saw that it was instinct with vitality. Pointing to the mother, he said, “This is the grand-niece of Eli Strassgood, the man who cursed Otto, Prince of Svir.”

“Yes, Excellency.”

“Have you heard what has befallen Otto, Prince of Svir?”

“We have heard nothing, Excellency.”

“He has been smitten with an incurable and loathsome disease. Some say that it was Eli’s curse, others that the disease was transmitted to him through the agency of some of your people in Moscow; he is a thing for all men to shun.”

A great hush fell upon the people, a dead stillness; then the dying woman on the grass couch rose on her elbow, and chanted, “The Watcher on the tower never wearies”; and the Israelites took up the chant, and sent it in deep, solemn, hushed voices, to mingle with the voices of the world outside, the voices of the wind, and the grass, and the trees. The stranger looked around, noting the exultant light in the flashing eyes and the uplifted expression upon each face; and it dawned upon him then, that to this remnant of a scattered people the living God was no mere shadow conjured up by priests, but a force that was a guard and guide to them in every phase of their tortured existence.

When the voices ceased again, he spoke, “I can understand your feelings to some extent,” he said; “for I am no Russian, but an Englishman. I can comprehend why you rejoice in the news I have brought to you; but, let me tell you, that if you would save this young child’s life, you will keep it out of the

reach of Prince Otto; for he has sworn to leave no remnant of Eli Strassgood's name alive in all Russia. I do not seek to advise you, for there is nothing in common between us; but, if I were interested in the matter, I should say, take that babe to England—it will be out of the reach of any Russian there; as for the rest of the Jews of Svir, if any wish to live they will do well to scatter, no two men remaining together, for all Russia is roused against them.”

“England is a far country,” said a Jew, “a far country, and we have neither silver nor gold; the prince stripped us of everything before he drove us forth from Svir.”

Again the Englishman stood in a thoughtful mood for many minutes, and the Jews watched his face anxiously. He did not look like a man who did things hastily; he had the face of a man who knew how to keep his feet upon the bed rock—no matter how deep the waters might be; and his looks were true to his nature; for Charles, Lord Fiveash, was no common man, no mere peg on which to hang a title. He was a statesman, a cynic, a gamester, a duellist, a traveller, a man of letters, and an aristocrat to his marrow; one of those men who, starting life full of generous impulses, find themselves confronted by the treachery and brutality of ordinary humanity, become cynics. No one knew better than he that there was much to lose, and little to gain, by befriending a persecuted Jew against the hate of a great Russian noble. He knew that such an act would make him unpopular with the men of his own circle throughout the whole of Europe and in England also, whilst the mob would hate him for standing as a friend to a Jew; yet it was not of those things that he thought, as he stood with knitted brows looking down upon the dying mother and the lusty child. He had too great

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a soul, this English roué, to think of personal inconvenience at such a time. He was great, this gambler and hell-rake, great in his sins which were many—ay, and great also in his virtues!

He stooped over the mother, and, looking into her face, saw that she had sunk into that deep lethargy that heralds death; then, looking round him, he said curtly, "To-night I will send my servant back with a conveyance; if you are of my mind you will have the child ready, and a nurse; send child and nurse without a word to me; the child shall go with me to England. If necessary, I will claim the babe as my own until we get out of Russia, and in England I will hand it over to a Jew of high repute in London, and will charge myself with the expense of its care and education. As for the rest of you I can do no more than this"—with a motion of his hand he threw a well-stuffed purse of gold on to the foot of the bed of grass where the dying woman lay. He did it carelessly, as a great noble conferring a gift upon a people he in his heart despised, little dreaming that he was throwing a grain of corn into a field that would return the men of his race many bushels of golden grain; for with the Jew this law is unalterable—help a Jew because he is a Jew in trouble, and the Hebrews will never turn their backs upon you in your hour of need. It may be merely Hebrew policy, but it is a fact which the histories of nations prove.

Charles, Lord Fiveash, did not wait to be thanked; he walked to his horse, swung himself slowly and easily into the saddle, saluted the group courteously, and rode off, and scarcely ever gave them another thought. They were men and women, and as such they could shift for themselves; but, just as the night was setting in, a drosky, with his servant Wyatt in command, drew up in front of the shed. A woman

with a swaddled child in her arms stepped swiftly forward and entered the vehicle. There was a low deep farewell from a circle of people ; and Wyatt, with little Laban Gotschalk and his nurse, moved off, leaving the mother's new-dug grave and the tragedy of the father's death behind in the falling night.

CHAPTER V

LONDON

THE London of to-day,—great, glorious, superb,—the mighty centre of a mighty Empire, was a very different place on that morning when young Laban Gotschalk was carried thither by his nurse, who was led by Wyatt, the servant of Lord Fiveash. The narrow streets, dirty and unlit, were foul with bad drainage and the accumulated garbage left by the tens of thousands who even then made England's capital their home. London was a great city then—great as regards numbers, wealth, and traditions; but it was a nest of vice, of debauchery, of wickedness, a hotbed of fevers and plagues. Men who had written great chapters in the history of the world, had walked those streets—women of genius, of wit and beauty, had made the unclean nest their home; but to the Londoner of to-day that reeking pesthouse of Laban Gotschalk's time would have appeared an Inferno. The law and order of to-day was a thing unknown then. London was the footpad's paradise, and the happy hunting-ground of the lowest kind of ruffian on the face of nature, who were a constant source of terror and pecuniary loss to the honest citizens who were then, as now, the backbone of the city.

The London police force, which is now the greatest monument to untrammelled justice in the universe,

had not then been created ; and in London the lot of the Jews was not then a happy or enviable one. But hard as their lot was in London, they enjoyed greater freedom, greater privileges, and greater rights than in any other part of the known world. At that period, if any man had dared to prophesy that a Jew would some day be Prime Minister of England, and prove himself one of the greatest men ever bred on English soil, he would have been deemed a maniac, and would have been lucky if he had escaped with nothing worse than ridicule. There were no schools for the Jewish poor, no organised help for the Jewish wanderer who might stray into the fog-bound forest of brick and mortar. Had the nurse and the child of the people of Svir entered London, unhelped, they would probably have sunk in the whirl of life that flooded the lower quarters—sunk, as so many of the poorer class of adventurers, both Jew and Gentile, sink ; but the man who had stretched out a hand to help them on Russian soil was not the kind of man to let them go to the wall in England. Wyatt, the serving-man, had his master's orders to see the pair of refugees safely to the dwelling of a Hebrew of good repute and some standing in the city ; and there both nurse and child were left, and in due season the child grew to boyhood and enjoyed the kindly patronage of the English noble who had rescued him in infancy. Perhaps it was the peculiar nature of his surroundings at the time of his birth that made Laban Gotschalk the sort of boy he became ; blood brewed under such circumstances is apt to become either weak as water or strong as wine ; and it was the wine of life that stirred in the boy's veins. He grew up brave, silent, strong—a man of affairs, a man fit for vast enterprise.

As soon as he had reached years of discretion all

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his history was told to him, and from that hour he conceived a passionate love for England and for all things English. Thanks to his patron he received a far better education than fell to the lot of most men of his time, and, being an untiring worker, he made full use of his opportunities. By the time Laban Gotschalk was in the first flush of his young manhood his patron had become the leading statesman in Europe; and many times, when it was necessary for him to know the real state of the feelings of foreign countries towards England, did he employ the silent, far-seeing young Hebrew to visit the capitals of the world to probe and search for the truth. In this way Laban Gotschalk visited in turn St. Petersburg, Moscow, Vienna, Paris, and every other city of note in the world; and everywhere he sang the praise of England in the ears of the Hebrews, and made friends, rich in money and in intellect, for the land that had given him shelter, until the Jews of Europe turned their eyes towards London, as the Mohammedan turns his face towards Mecca.

But it was not in such work alone that the Hebrew spent his days; he threw the whole weight of his intelligence into business, and, backed by his connection with the ruling class in London, he soon became a figure of no mean importance. In matrimony, as in business, he was successful; for in his thirtieth year he married an English Jewess who brought him a dowry that lifted him far upon the path he had mapped out for himself.

When his patron, Lord Fiveash, died—a savage, broken-down old worldling—Laban Gotschalk was at his bedside, and the Englishman had no more sincere mourner than the Hebrew.

The years that followed were years of untiring toil for the Jew; he made his name a sign of power in

many lands; for treasures increased under his skilful touch, not by magic but by the genius of ceaseless work. Magic is pabulum for fools, work is the sign-manual of greatness; and Laban Gotschalk was great. He looked at London and saw many of its sores, and, using other men as instruments, he did much in his day and generation to make it a better and a greater city. In his own family circle he was happy; seven sons and five daughters came to him, and to each of them he told the story of his life.

There were two days in the year which nothing ever disturbed in his family—one was a day of feasting, and the other a day of fasting. The feast-day was the day of his birth, the day his patron found him and gave him succour. On the anniversary of that day he would gather all his friends around him; and it was his custom to recite to them the whole episode, beginning with the life in the Russian village and the journey through the forest, and ending with the death of Charles, Lord Fiveash; and he would adjure his sons and daughters to keep that day as a feast-day and a day of thankfulness for all time, bidding them hand down to their children, and their children's children, the memory of the man who saved the tree of the house of Gotschalk from being cut off root and branch. The fast-day was the anniversary of the day the Jews were driven out of Svir and the old man Eli was stoned to death. On these occasions he and all his house mourned and ate no bread—neither man, woman, nor child, excepting only the child at the breast; and Eli's curse on the house of the Prince of Svir was repeated and endorsed. The good that the English noble had done to the house of Gotschalk was to be repaid, if occasion should ever serve, to his descendants; and the evil of the Prince of Svir was to be held in hand

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for his race and name, until an eye for an eye had been rendered.

There was a touch of old time Eastern savagery about this creed of the house of Gotschalk, but there was also a savour of nobility, of strength, and justice.

The head of the noble house of Fiveash had left three sons to perpetuate his name, his follies, and his virtues.

The grim Prince of Svir, who had lived to old age, a thing apart from mankind, in a little lonely hut on his estates, left but one son born to him before that fateful night when Eli cursed him root and branch, and died. The son of the tainted prince, inheriting his father's hate of the Hebrews, made life a burden to any of that race who came in his path; he, as became his rank, entered the Russian army when little more than a lad, and his brute courage and instinctive military skill soon brought him into prominence. He loved the dangers of his profession, loved the struggles with the wild tribes that dwelt on the Russian borders, and the occasional battles with the French, and soon made for himself a reputation for ruthlessness that made veterans look upon him as something akin to a fiend. But it was in the cities that his worst side became most apparent. Whenever a tumult arose amongst the outraged people, he was always prompt to volunteer for service—for in the suppression of the people he found a chance always to harry the Jews; and harry them he did. No matter what caused the uproar, if he were in the city he soon obtained evidence sufficient to enable him to make a descent upon the Hebrews, and neither age, nor position, nor sex, found pity at his hands. A hundred times his life was conspired against, and a hundred times he escaped; and at each fresh attempt upon his life he grew more and more reckless. Once

even the Czar remonstrated with him for his persecutions, and he had replied firmly, "If I had the power I would drive every Hebrew out of Russia, ay, and make war on any power that gave them shelter; I would not leave a live Jew in any hole or corner of Christendom."

When he married, he took to wife a woman of nearly pure Tartar blood—a fierce, vindictive, haughty woman; not beautiful of face, but possessing a figure of superb power and grace, a woman full of virility. She was an ice-storm from the steppes, and in her seasons she gave him four sons, and each son became a soldier and a Hebrew-hater. So it came about that the old men of both races laid down life's burdens, life's loves and hates, and the dust claimed them; and there were left to carry on the debt, in the year 18—, the seven sons of Laban Gotschalk, who were all cultured men and financiers, known and esteemed, not in England only but half over Europe—men of large ideas, prone to good works, and the promoters of many noble institutions; the four sons of Prince Otto of Svir, who were all soldiers and men of great physical power and considerable intellect, of the combative order; and the son and daughter of Lord Charles Fiveash, who had rescued the infant Hebrew on the edge of the forest of Sukhona; and one other of the same family who belonged to a younger branch.

CHAPTER VI

THE BALL

THE ballroom in Lord Fiveash's London mansion was brilliant with the blaze of wax tapers. There was nothing cheap or gaudy, nothing new or modern, about the grand low-ceiled old place. The wax tapers twinkled like myriad stars in a sky of blackness, the wainscoting was of oak so ancient that time had made it look like ebony, and the waxed floor was scarcely less dark. Men and women of rank and fashion thronged the room, the men dressed in the elegant dress of the period which gave such superb opportunities to the beau with the well-turned ankle and the nicely modelled calf. Dandies ruffled it in silk and lace, and did not disdain to make free use of any colour that appealed to their artistic fancies. The gentlewomen with their patches and powder, their free speech—a trifle too free in most cases—their enormous hoops, and their boundless display of jewels, fitted that ancient hall to perfection.

In the card-room, adjacent to the ballroom, men and women gambled openly; now and again a good round oath would slip from the lips of some player whose fortune was worse than indifferent, or a pettish exclamation, flavoured with a strong Anglo-Saxon expletive, would break from lips that nature made for kisses.

In quiet nooks a good deal of flirting and smothered laughter and gossiping was going on, during which many a fair dame's character, or young gallant's reputation, got badly smirched.

In some of the more secluded corners, men past the first blush of youth talked together sedately; and the theme of conversation upon all lips was the most recent exploits of the man who was just then filling the eye of the world—the audacious young Corsican, Napoleon Bonaparte.

In a little alcove three men were talking earnestly, not babbling, or idling away the time in flimsy speculative gossip. The man at the far side of the table was the old Lord Fiveash, a man whose words had the wisdom that comes with the winter of life. He was a statesman, as his father had been before him; and in his youth, he, like his father, had been both gamester and duellist; a man slow to give offence, slow to take it, but inexorable when forced to pick up a quarrel. He had always prided himself upon doing things like a gentleman.

Once, when a noisy young buck was attempting to fix a quarrel upon him, he had turned in his coolly intolerant way, and remarked, "If you want me to kill you, sir, at least, let me do it in a gentlemanly manner; if you are merely seeking a brawl, let me recommend you to my groom." That was the Fiveash way. On another occasion, when a captain in the French navy had demanded and obtained a meeting for some imaginary affront, the Frenchman had rushed impetuously at him, lunging and slashing in his excitement, like a tyro, until my lord had whipped his blade out of his hand, and left him glaring, savage, and weaponless. "Monsieur has mistaken his vocation," he had said blandly, "Monsieur would be more at home in a field cutting

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down corn." At the second bout the Frenchman, more enraged than ever, threw himself on the Englishman, like a yokel at a fair, and was again disarmed. Lord Fiveash picked up the sailor's sword and, handing it to him, said, "If Monsieur will be advised by me, he will have his sword beaten into a pruning-hook and practise on a hedge; he might hit that." Then, handing his sword to his second, he walked away and put on his cravat and coat, and nothing would tempt him to renew the combat.

The man on my lord's right was General Durrant, a soldier of some eminence, in the prime of life. The man, on the other side, was Eli Gotschalk, the second son of the great financier. In society he was known as Mr. Thornton, for even in those days the Hebrews had considered it expedient to bury their identity and their race under assumed names. His host knew whom he was, and what he was, and perhaps a dozen others, men moving in the highest circles in England, knew also, but no more; and as Mr. Thornton he will henceforth figure in this story. Lord Fiveash was speaking, "You know Europe as well, perhaps better, than any man in England, Thornton; what do you make of the situation now?"

"It is grave," was the quiet reply, "but no graver than it has been ever since Bonaparte rose to power. There will be no peace while he lives."

"Do you credit these coffee-house rumours concerning the Corsican's intention to invade Russia?"

"Yes, my lord; sooner or later Bonaparte will invade Russia, and he will bring ruin upon himself in the attempt."

"I don't believe he will try," put in General Durrant; "but, if he does, he will drive the Russians

in front of him like goats ; the Russians are a poor fighting people."

Mr. Thornton smiled. "You speak like a soldier, General."

"Well," replied the general testily, "I am a soldier, and, of course, I speak like one. Why not?"

"Why not, indeed," said Mr. Thornton, calmly ; and yet there are so many other things to be considered beside soldiers, in a war."

"'Pon my honour, I don't follow you, sir ; war is a soldier's game, if I mistake not."

"Soldiers are only pawns in the game of war, General ; they don't count for much, except in the actual striking of blows. The real power lies behind and above and beyond the soldier, and if Bonaparte invades Russia he will find it out."

Lord Fiveash nodded his head comprehensibly. "You are right, Thornton ; by Jove, you mostly are right."

"Well," put in the general, "you are too deep for me. I don't see anything in war but the opposition of armies."

"That is a soldier's duty," said my lord suavely. "A fighting man's duty is to fight."

"What were you alluding to, Mr. Thornton, when you said that Bonaparte would find at least two other factors besides soldiers arrayed against him if he invaded Russia?"

"The Russian climate, in the first place, General ; and the want of money in the second. For my part, I should place the want of money first."

"You think Bonaparte will want more money than he will be able to find for such a task?"

"Yes, and want of money will mean want of horses, want of arms, want of proper supplies, want of men

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to keep his lines of communication open, want of everything that will count for success; give him money enough, and he will hold the world in the hollow of his hand. Gold is mightier than steel, General. Bonaparte talks of the English fleet being his great stumbling-block, but he has found English gold a barrier to many of his plans, and will find it in his path again."

"Ah, well," laughed the general, "I pin my faith to English steel and English hearts. Ah! I see your son rising from the table, my lord; pardon me, gentlemen, if I join him"; and, with a careless bow, the soldier moved away to join a young man who had just abandoned one of the card-tables.

"You really think there is something in this Russian business, then, Thornton?" continued Lord Fiveash, as the soldier and his son moved away amidst cries of careless badinage from the gamblers.

"Yes, but it is a matter for the future; to-day Bonaparte's hands are tied."

"Want of money, eh?"

"Yes, want of money."

"You succeeded, then?"

"Yes, my lord, no Hebrew will finance the present government in France to the extent of a guinea; and the Hebrews have many channels for working upon the coinage of the world."

"Bonaparte will get it in spite of you."

"He will get some, undoubtedly; he will not get all he requires; he will only get what he can take with the bayonet; and it will take time for him to get any, with the forces now arrayed against him in active operation."

"You have done well, and I am grateful. I wish I could serve you in some way, Thornton."

"The debt is on my side, my lord; you owe my

family for some slight services; we owe you and yours everything, our very existence, and our position in the world. Do you think I have forgotten? Do you think I will ever forget? Never, never!"

The man spoke with sudden intensity, quite at variance with his usual cool, calm mode of speech, showing that his nature had been touched to its inner chords. The old lord had laid his fingers upon his heart-strings, and like some rich-toned harp his nature had responded to the touch.

"Pooh, pooh, Thornton, that debt you speak of has been paid a thousandfold. Are you going to take a turn around the room? I'm just going to have a word with my son, and then I shall go off to bed. I'm getting old, Thornton, devilish old, and this statecraft takes all the marrow out of a man; but I shall sleep all the sounder to-night for having seen you; and yet I ought to have known, by past experience, that you would not have failed in your French mission. You never have failed, by Jove, no, never once, when I come to think of it. I wish I had you in the Cabinet, I do, by gad, sir," and he held out his thin white hand, which Mr. Thornton took and pressed fervently.

"Never mind about the Cabinet, my lord, I think I can serve you and serve England as well out of it as in it. Good-night, my lord."

"Good-night, Thornton."

Half an hour later, as Mr. Thornton was making his way towards the supper-room, he came in contact with the daughter of his host, with her hand upon the arm of a man who towered above almost every other man in the room by half a head, a man with the figure of a gladiator, and a hard, harsh face. At that time the Lady Jane was just budding to

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the full of that exquisite beauty which later on made her the toast of half the clubs in England. A tiny, fair, childish-looking creature, with big blue eyes and soft red lips. At the first glance the face was almost babyish in its beauty, but a second glance revealed the lines of a fine strong character about the rosebud face. The man who mistook the Lady Jane Fiveash for a fool, on account of her prettiness, was a poor judge of human nature. "La, Mr. Thornton," she cried gaily, as she saw that gentleman, "Charles told me you were here, and I am glad to see you; let me present you to my friend, Prince Otto of Svir. Prince, this is one of my father's closest friends, and one of my dearest."

The two men looked at each other for a full second, and then bowed distantly. To the prince the introduction and the chance meeting meant nothing. To Mr. Thornton it meant a page out of a life's diary. They presented a striking contrast as they stood there face to face. The prince was far and away the finer man physically; his great height and breadth of shoulder, his haughty carriage, and the poise of his head, made all who came in contact with him appear commonplace. But Mr. Thornton, himself a fine man—tall, lithe, broad of shoulder—had the advantage of the Russian in the matter of feature and expression. His face was intellectual, and, while lacking the almost brute-like display of animal courage that the Russian's face portrayed, he did not show a feeble front. His chief characteristic was power under control, whilst the Russian as plainly showed power licensed to lawlessness.

The prince and his partner passed on, and Mr. Thornton strolled away as coolly as though the name of the man he had just met carried no significance for him; and yet, at that moment, his heart was hot,

with intense passion, and every fibre of his strong nature was stirred to the quick. From infancy he had been taught to hate the name that had just rung in his ears; from childhood he had been schooled to think of its owner as a tyrant, an oppressor of his race and family; and regularly, every year since he had reached years of discretion, he had registered a solemn vow to work the undoing of the man who carried that name, if opportunity should serve. It was characteristic of the man that at such a time he should remain a perfect master of himself.

Had the prince known who Mr. Thornton was, there might have been a scene of a different character. As it was, the haughty noble did not allow his thoughts to dwell for one moment upon the man he had met, but concentrated all his energies upon the conquest of the woman who hung upon his arm. He had first met the Lady Jane Fiveash in St. Petersburg about a year before this ball, and had desired her for her infantile beauty. At first he had considered that her conquest would prove an easy matter, for he had not looked below the surface. He was used to the admiration of women—this man with the half-savage face and superb physique. There was something about his manner of wooing that suggested the whirlwind. He was in all things a disciple of the religion of force. It was his way to compel women to admire him by the magnetism of his personality, and the virility that ran riot in his blood; but he had found those tactics unavailing with the bonny English beauty. She exacted homage from her admirers as a right. She had met men in her own country as forceful, as virile, and as intolerant as he; and she had either tamed them or snubbed them, according to her humour. Her

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character was a puzzle to this half-tamed Tartar. Had she been a Russian he might have gone far in his pique ; but she was an English gentlewoman, and in those days an English name was its own passport to respect, for the dandies of English society were men who were swift to resent an insult. Jane Fiveash had gone to Russia with her mother and her only brother Charles, who was then training under a wise diplomat for the career of statecraft which the men of his family had followed generation after generation. Prince Otto had met both brother and sister, and was inclined to despise the brother as much as he admired the sister. There was nothing imposing about the personal appearance of Charles Fiveash ; he was of medium height, but too square across the shoulders to cut a graceful figure. His clean-shaven face was too impassive to be handsome, because he had the habit of his family, the habit of the Orient, rather than of English, of keeping all emotions, whether of grief or joy, or rage or despair, out of sight. Prince Otto had made up his mind that Charles Fiveash was simply a stupid person, who had the great good fortune to be blessed with a lovely sister ; and, as it was necessary to his plans to stand well with the brother, he did his best to make Charlie's visit to Russia both amusing and instructive. Sometimes he used to wonder, when he noticed the deference paid to the young man by the soldiers, sailors, and diplomats of his own country who came across him in Russia. Once he had even gone so far as to ask Charles if he had ever done anything in England to make a name for himself ; and Charles with his most serious look upon his preternaturally serious face, had replied, that he had won some slight manner of fame as a writer of sonnets ; and it was as a writer of sonnets that the haughty, intolerant prince

looked upon him. Had Charles been a soldier, he would have held him in higher esteem, even though he might have had a poor opinion of the quiet and seemingly rather dull young man; but for the writer of sonnets and the dilettante in the game of diplomacy he had a rough contempt. But Charles Fiveash, serving his novitiate under one of the most astute men of the age, let the prince think of him as lightly as he would, for Prince Otto was useful to him, a mere tool in the hands of a workman who was one day to play with greater game than Otto of Svir.

It was the Lady Jane that had attracted the Russian to London; he scarcely knew himself why he wanted her; he did not like the English as a nation, and he detested London as a city, though it was not even in those days as dirty, as evil, as vicious or as lawless as his own beloved Moscow. But his first visit to England had taught him that he could do things in Moscow that he could not dare attempt to do in London; on that first visit he had an adventure which had surprised him. He had been walking by the Thames, dressed, according to his rank, in rich apparel; and a rough weather-stained bargee had inadvertently splashed him with muddy water. With a full-flavoured oath the man had turned and expressed his sorrow for the occurrence, which was an accident patent to all who were with the prince; but he, unused to placing the slightest restraint upon his feelings, snatched a cane from a waiting gentleman and began to belabour the big brawny fellow just as if he had been a Russian serf. The man, taken by surprise, did not resent the action for a moment; but the indignant shout of a boat-woman, and a wrathful cry from the crowd, brought home to him the shame of a whipping, and doubling his great dirty fists, almost as hard as the gear he handled

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daily, he struck Prince Otto of Svir full on the face and sent him sprawling at the feet of his attendants; and when he arose the bargee promptly knocked him into the mire again; and when the gentry interfered, which they did in a very half-hearted way, the crowd of river hands turned upon them and hustled them from the river frontage, until the whole party had been glad to take shelter behind the watch that had come upon the scene, roused by the uproar.

Later on, when Prince Otto had made complaint in high places and demanded the man's punishment, he had been curtly told that he must not introduce his Russian habits into England, or next time he might find himself flung into the river instead of into the mire. He had not forgotten the lesson, but he had never ceased to dislike the English; they were, he avowed, a common, vulgar people, who had no idea of the real dignity of the great.

CHAPTER VII

THE WRITER OF SONNETS

MR. THORNTON saw something else at the ball, which gave him cause for thought beside the wooing of the Prince of Svir. He saw that Charles Fiveash was enamoured of Constance Stanleigh, the daughter of the Honourable Eustace Stanleigh, one of the most ambitious women of that set, a woman of almost masculine force of character, and a born intriguer. At that period women played a big part in the affairs of nations, and not always a wise part. Constance Stanleigh was selfish beyond the lot of most human beings; if she could have seen a path open to a throne she would have struggled for the crown; she believed that there was no position upon the earth which she could not fill. Young, beautiful, well-born, highly educated, and utterly conscienceless, she was a woman to be dreaded rather than encouraged by such a man as Charles Fiveash. She seldom wasted either her time or her charms upon young men; old men who had the knowledge of the great political world at their finger-ends were the men whose society she affected; budding diplomats she did not require, because she flattered herself that she already knew more of the winding mazes of diplomacy than they could teach her; and she was probably right, because she had an instinct for affairs

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which usually put her in close proximity with the truth. She had for a long time been trying to get an opportunity to take an active part in affairs, but English statesmen were more chary of using women for their purposes than their continental neighbours. But her chance had come at last. Old Lord Effingham had said to her in his courtly way (he was her uncle, and had known of her ambitions from girlhood), "My dear girl, you have been wanting to be of service to me for years, now, if you care to meddle with such a dirty game as statecraft, just try and find out if there is any ulterior motive in the visit of Prince Otto of Svir to London. He does not often honour us with a visit, and his ostensible reason for coming here now is, I believe, that he may press his suit for the hand of the Lady Jane Fiveash; but there may be another reason, and if so I should like to know what it is. I admit that prince is about the last man on earth one would choose for a delicate mission, but Russian diplomacy is hard to follow, and this rough prince may have a more subtle intellect than he is credited with." She had made up her mind to commence operations upon him that night at the ball, but two factors were at work against her—one was the presence of Charles Fiveash, who was so assiduous in his attentions to her that she wished him fathoms deep in the channel; she would have got rid of him, if there had been no other obstacle; but she found that, whether Prince Otto had come from Russia on any other mission or not, he was at least doing his best to push his fortunes with the Lady Jane. He danced with her whenever he could get an opportunity, and he danced as few men could. He made himself conspicuous by his ardent attentions; and Constance Stanleigh, with all her arts, found it impossible to draw him from the

shrine where he was evidently determined to worship. She had never liked Jane Fiveash, but this night she fairly loathed her, and her dislike was more intense because she saw that the dainty little gentlewoman did nothing to attract her cavalier; in fact, by following Jane's glances, she saw that there was another gallant in the room with whom Jane Fiveash would have preferred to spend all the time she could spare from the duties of the house; this was Captain George Fiveash, a cousin of the little gentlewoman's, a member of a very poor branch of the Fiveash family, who served in the British navy, and possessed nothing on earth but his sword and his pay, which was barely sufficient to keep him decently. He had no expectations beyond what might come his way in the course of his profession. As she watched the glances that passed between the sailor and his cousin, a half-forgotten rumour that had reached her, concerning a boy and girl attachment between the pair, flashed into her memory; and she at once decided to use the sailor to get rid of her rival, and then use the pair to dispose of Charles Fiveash. To this end she beckoned the captain to her and engaged him in lively raillery, exerting herself to the utmost to bring the every-ready laughter to the sailor's lips, an easy task, for there were few more light-hearted men afloat or ashore than he. In appearance and build he was not unlike his cousin Charles, but no two men could possibly have been more unlike in manner and temperament; the sailor was a grown-up boy, full of laughter and faith in humanity. The summer breezes playing with the waves seemed to have got into his voice, and the sunlight glancing from the sea had nestled in his eyes and stayed there. He was a true type of the men who made England mistress of the world of waters, a joyous,

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careless fellow ashore; a confident, daring, reckless fighter at sea. Like a true sailor he accepted the challenge in the eyes of the fair woman, who sat and flirted her fan and said gay things to him above the feathers. He was a man well liked by most people, and it did not surprise him that this beautiful creature whom he had met a dozen times before should enjoy his company, though he knew well enough that his poverty prevented her from entertaining anything but a passing fancy for him. He had a fund of anecdotes that never failed him, and spurred on partly by the charm of his companion's manner, and partly to show the Lady Jane that he could find a market for his company, even if she despised it, he did his very best to charm; and by so doing annoyed both his cousins, for Charles wanted the lady to himself, and went off somewhat piqued when he saw how thoroughly she enjoyed the sailor's piquant conversation; and Jane, because she would have liked above all things to have had the sailor and his merry laugh, his dancing blue eyes and his boyish voice, for her own eyes and ears. Charles sauntered from one group to the other, just long enough to avoid notice, and then betook himself to one of the tables and began to play rather more heavily than he usually did, though he had the gambler's taint in his blood. As for his sister, she was equally piqued, but as we know from a different cause, made some laughing excuse to Prince Otto about having most shamefully neglected her father's guests, and then swept off to where Mr. Thornton was standing surveying the scene. As she passed the sailor she gave him a glance, which told him plainly enough that, by some means or other, he had woefully offended her; all his gay stories died within him, and he looked very blankly after

the little spitfire, who had withered him with a look; for one glance of kindness from Cousin Jane was worth more to him than all smiles, or sighs, of all the other women in the King's realm. His companion caught sight of his face, and, shaking her fan at him, laughingly charged him with having only made use of her to fill in an idle time, whilst he waited for the mistress of his heart. He rallied and threw the jest back at her, but she, becoming serious, on the moment bade him slip away and make his peace with Jane Fiveash. "I know your cousin, sir," she said, with a little grimace, "and do not desire to place her upon my list of enemies, so go to her and make the best face you can, for you have been flirting with me most outrageously right under her nose; and now you will find some difficulty in making her believe you were merely toying with me, whilst you waited for a nod from her. Yes, sir, you will find it more difficult to make *her* believe that, than you found *me*."

He laughed, for he plainly saw that she was bent upon getting rid of him to further some scheme of her own; for the sailor was no fool, though somewhat out of his element in a ballroom; so he took himself off, and, seeing his cousin talking to Mr. Thornton, he made his way to her, only to be greeted with a chilly bow, and the hope that he had not found the time hang heavily upon his hands. He braced himself manfully against what he termed "the foul weather he had run into," and tried to carry all before him with a merry story, which caused Mr. Thornton to laugh consumedly; but his cousin met his efforts with a wintry, little, forced society smile.

"So good of you, Cousin George, to go to so much trouble for our poor sakes," she cried; "but if I must

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have a story I must have it first hand ; and this one is one that you were at pains to tell to Constance Stanleigh, not ten minutes back, and it loses its edge by repetition."

It was true he had told that story amongst others to the fair Constance, and his cousin had guessed it ; but she had taken him by the beard, as he termed it, and he was fairly beaten ; so, after essaying a few more pleasantries and meeting with no better fortune, he determined, in his quaint phraseology of the sea, not to attempt to try and beat up against a strong head wind, but to slip his cable and drift where the tide might take him ; and the tide of his fate drifted him to the table where his cousin Charles was playing, and once more he met with a very cold reception.

"Devil take all fair-weather friends," muttered the son of the sea, as he pushed through the crowd, seeking a familiar and friendly face ; "a man meets little else ashore."

Constance Stanleigh had not wasted her opportunity. As soon as she got rid of Captain George she made her way to Prince Otto's side, and, exerting herself to the utmost, she soon had him embarked upon a tide of small talk and general gossip. She had many talents, but she excelled principally as a linguist, a gift not common among Englishwomen. The prince was charmed with his companion ; she was so full of the life and swing of cities, so audacious, so magnetic in her beauty, and such a perfect mistress of the art of coquetry, that he scarce knew how far he might dare to go, and yet scarcely knew where to stop short. She dazzled him with her wit, she inflamed the coarser side of his nature by her physical charms, until he began to wonder in earnest what he could have seen in

that other woman to keep him dangling at her skirts so long.

Mr. Thornton, watching the human comedy with his shrewd senses all on the alert, arrived at the conclusion that Constance Stanleigh was worth watching, as far as her relations with Prince Otto of Svir was concerned. "She will singe her wings, if she is not careful, was his reflection; she does not understand that type of man—an Englishman is always chivalrous to a woman, especially when she has been guilty of an indiscretion; but Prince Otto will trample her in the dust if she falls into his hands." Then, running his eyes around the room, he saw Jane Fiveash pretending to be happy with a couple of ancient dowagers, and, catching her eye, he induced her to come to him.

"You want to talk to me, Mr. Thornton?" she asked.

"I want the daughter of my best friend to do me a favour," he replied.

"And the favour is granted, as you knew it would be. Please tell me what it is?"

A light that was almost a laugh leapt into his eyes. "There is a naval officer here to-night who is ripe for any foolishness; he is waiting now at one of the tables for a chance to play, and will probably sit down in the first vacant chair and lose in half an hour a whole year's pay, because some one I know has been harsh with him. I am going to bring him to this alcove, and if I do not find it empty, when I return, I am going to leave him; if not, I am going to inflict my company upon him until he either falls asleep from sheer weariness, or else picks a quarrel with me. He has a heart of oak, Lady Jane."

"A head of oak you mean, sir," she retorted, half

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angry, half laughing; "well, as you wish it, and I have given you my promise, I will try and hear with patience the stale stories he invented for the amusement of Constance Stanleigh," and with this last shaft she left him.

He smiled serenely to himself, this astute kindly man, as he went in search of the sailor, for he had some time previously arrived at the conclusion that the pair were fond of each other. What such a fondness might lead to no man could guess, for the sailor's poverty seemed an insuperable bar to his love-making. Mr. Thornton had never given the affairs of the lovers any real attention. He was not a meddler, in any sense, and usually believed in allowing things of that kind to adjust themselves; but now that Prince Otto had come upon the scene, he was drawn to take an active interest in the sailor's wooing. By nature he was a kindly man, and would have stirred himself on the captain's behalf had his sympathies been appealed to. Now, however, he had a game to play which woke all his dormant energies. He had to thwart Prince Otto's intentions of a matrimonial alliance with the family of Fiveash, and thwart the prince he would, no matter what the operation might cost; for if he allowed the head of the house of his family enemy to marry the daughter of the man he was sworn to protect and aid, under all circumstances, how could he carry on the debt of either love or hate? how extract full payment from his foe? how pay to the uttermost farthing the debt due to the race that had saved his own from extinction?

He found the sailor with very little trouble, and on pretence of gaining from him some information in regard to His Majesty's navy, drew him away from the tables, and by degrees led him to the spot

where the Lady Jane was sitting in anything but a gentle mood. She saw the pair approaching, and her heart warmed once more to the sailor cousin whose lines were cast in such unpleasant places. He looked so manly and so self-reliant amongst the throng of dandies, and she knew that he would soon again have to join his ship; and after all he was so poor, that he had few opportunities of enjoying himself. And so in this wise she made excuses for him, as a maid will when her heart sides with her head; nevertheless, she was annoyed with him for flirting right under her nose with another woman, and she would punish him for it in many ways: she would see to that. So she was ripe for mischief when Mr. Thornton, with the captain at his side, stepped in front of her. The sailor was just in the midst of a description of the kind of craft he considered the British navy should be supplied with for cutting out operations, to be used against the French, to which narrative the great financier was giving his most earnest attention, just for all the world as if he was wrapped up heart and soul in the navy.

"Bless my soul, but here is your cousin sitting companionless, for a wonder," exclaimed Mr. Thornton; and the captain at once dropped his narrative concerning the ideal ship of war for which his soul yearned, and turned his attention to the exquisite little gentlewoman.

"Pray don't let me interfere with your conversation," she said acidly. "I was tired, and was moping for a few minutes; besides, I can see the Prince of Svir looking for me, and I think he has a claim upon me for this dance."

"Do not meddle with the work of the gods, Lady Jane," pleaded Mr. Thornton; "your cousin has just

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been describing to me the class of ship he thinks is most needed in the navy for the work of harassing the French, if we are forced to strike at them again; and your noble father has often assured me that you have a better general knowledge of the British navy than half the sea lords in England. May I crave your indulgence, and ask you to stay and hear our discussion?"

"I fear I should make a poor third in such a meeting, sir," she said, giving Mr. Thornton an arch glance; and then, with a swift half angry look at the sailor, "I notice that now the prince has vacated his seat for a moment. Constance Stanleigh is looking wearied to death; she, I am sure, would be more to your liking than a cousin of your own."

A good-tempered laugh was the captain's only reply to this attack, and Mr. Thornton coming to the rescue, the three were soon in the midst of an animated discussion concerning the merits of certain classes of ships for aggressive purposes against the French.

"Do you know, sir," said the captain, "that it seems to me that we English do not do much to hurt France; we ought to fit out a small lightly armed class of ship, and so harry all vessels that carry the French flag, that no Frenchman would dare show out of port. It's all very well to force their fleet to an engagement from time to time, and beat them, but it is the commerce, not the fleet, that we should strike at; for it is the commerce that hurts or helps a nation."

Mr. Thornton smiled his deep unfathomable smile. "Sailors are like soldiers," he said, addressing the young lady; "they think they control the destinies of nations, but they don't. You can do more with a pound of gold than you can do with a ton of

gunpowder. It is England's wealth, not England's ships or men, that this wonderful despot Bonaparte dreads. He would have mastered the world before now, if we had not known how to purchase and supply arms for troops of friendly powers on the Continent; and not arms alone, but money to pay the Continental armies to fight. Diplomacy is the only thing that will check Bonaparte, but none the less I like your idea in regard to small swift ships, for the purpose you mention, Captain; perhaps you may hear more of this matter at some later date."

"The Russians seem very friendly towards us just now, sir," interposed Jane Fiveash.

"The Russians are now what they have been all along, my dear young lady; they are self-seekers, and will play fast and loose with us, as they have done before. I mistrust the Russians, and look with something like dread upon an Anglo-Russian alliance; in their hearts the Russians dislike the English as much as they dislike the French, and will gladly entrap us into a difficult situation. Besides, Bonaparte has his agents in every Russian centre; even Russian princes, he added meaningly, are not above being tampered with, and Bonaparte's genius for intrigue is as great as his genius for war."

"Have you ever met Bonaparte?" Mr. Thornton.

"Oh yes, I have met him often," was the calm reply; "I met him first in the middle of 1793 here in London, when he was practically an unknown man. I visited him at his lodgings in the Adelphi."

"Is there any truth in the report that he once asked for a commission in the English army?"

Mr. Thornton held up a reproving finger, and smilingly replied, "My dear Lady Jane, there are

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some questions which are an indiscretion, and, pardon me, this seems to me to be one of them."

The lady bit her lip with vexation—she was vexed, not because of the reproof, but because of its justice—she, the daughter of the most astute man in England, should have known better than to have made such a blunder.

Mr. Thornton took his leave shortly after this little episode, and the cousins were left to their own devices, and woefully unkind the sailor found the dainty little gentlewoman. Yet, had he only known as much concerning women as he did about the sea, he would not have been so cast down at her raillery; for unless she cared for him, with something more than mere cousinly sentiment, why should she be so deeply annoyed at his attentions to other women. Cousins who only care in a cousinly way for a man don't as a general rule take so much notice of his flirtations.

"I thought you were enjoying yourself so much with that Russian fellow," he said, "that there was nothing else for me to do but wait your pleasure."

"He is one of my father's guests," she said with dignity, "and I simply paid him the courtesies due to a guest and a stranger, whilst you drew the eyes of half the people in the room upon you by the attentions you paid Constance Stanleigh—pooh, sir, don't deny it. It made me feel ill to see a cousin of mine dangling after that woman. Look at her now, she is simply running after the Prince of Svir."

"Ah, Jane," retorted the sailor, "perhaps it is *that* which makes you feel ill."

And then the lovers had a very pretty quarrel, which ended in the Lady Jane going forth to do the honours of the house with her chin an inch

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higher in the air than usual; whilst the sailor took himself off to his lodgings with an angry heart, vowing to himself that, if opportunity should serve, he would do his best to make London a particularly lively place for Prince Otto of Svir.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. THORNTON HAS A VISITOR

AT that period with which this story deals plots and counter-plots were being laid in all the great cities of the world, and nowhere were they more rife than in London; for just then England was the very keystone of the arch of the world. Bonaparte was vainly attempting to bribe England's ministers to enter into an alliance with him, so that he might fetter his Continental foes; he wanted the freedom of the seas, and was willing to make any terms to obtain that end. His agents were busy in every circle where their influence could be of any use to him; but cool, shrewd eyes were upon him and his agents. Never has England been better served by unsleeping diplomats than at this period of her career, and never had she needed the silent, unobtrusive band of loyal workers more. And amongst the most astute and most trusted of all her watchers, trusted both by king and ministers, though unknown to the nation, was Mr. Thornton, who figured in society as a pleasant, affable gentleman of large means, with a fondness for travel in foreign parts. His brothers attended to the gigantic financial business of the house of Gotschalk; he moved on a loftier plane, and did England yeoman service.

A couple of days after the ball described in the

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last chapter, his servant brought him a note as he was sitting dallying with his morning meal. The letter contained only a few words written in Hebrew; he read it with no apparent concern, trifled with his breakfast for a few moments longer, and then said, "Is the bearer of this waiting for a reply?"

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

"Then send him to me, but give him to understand that he must be brief, for I am busy this morning."

As the servant left the room to do his errand a laugh crept into the eyes of Mr. Thornton: it was evident that he saw some element of comedy somewhere in this early visit. But there was no comedy in his face as his servant ushered his visitor into the room and stood awaiting orders.

"You may go, Saxon," he said, in his usual calm, even voice; "but please remain within reach of my voice, for I may require you shortly." The servant bowed and withdrew from the room, closing the door behind him. The moment the servant's back was turned, Mr. Thornton bent eagerly and swiftly forward, and, placing his lips to his visitor's ear, whispered, "To-night, at eight of the clock, in your room in the old place; my servant is a creature of Bonaparte, he is in French pay." Then, aloud, he asked, "What can I do for you, sir?"

The visitor, who spoke English with some slight accent, proceeded to say that he was an embarrassed gentleman, who had come to England in the hope of settling down in quietness, and, as he had some jewels to dispose of, he had been recommended by an Austrian friend to apply to Mr. Thornton for advice in regard to the finding of an honest dealer.

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"I am afraid I can be of but little use to you, sir," was the suave answer, "but all I can do I will perform with pleasure. I will give you a note of introduction to a well-known London firm, who will, I feel assured, treat you fairly in any transaction they may undertake; pray be seated whilst I write the note."

At that moment the sound of a slight scuffle reached the ears of the two men; it came from the passage by which the servant Saxon had disappeared. They waited a second, and then they heard Saxon's voice say, in a savage half-whisper, as if he feared to create a disturbance, "Devil take you for a clumsy, brutish fellow; you are drunk every night and half-drunk in the morning."

"Vy, as for that, vell, I ain't so drunk as ter lean vith my ears against my master's doors," replied a voice in the mellow dialect of St. Giles.

"You lie, like the gutter vagabond you are," was the savage retort. "I was only leaning against the wall for a moment because I twisted my ankle in this cursed dark passage."

"Oh, vos you, seems ter me this is a houtregeous unlucky passage; last time I saw you vaiting near the door you had slipped on the top stair hand 'urt yer back; got an uncommon funny vay of fallin' against a door with yer hear to a crack, you 'ave. Do you ever tell yer mother abart yer haccidents; I vould, if I vos you, she might believe yer."

Mr. Thornton got up from his chair, and went to the door. In the passage two men were standing in a bellicose attitude; one was the man-servant Saxon, the other was a sort of half servant, half messenger, who had lived in the lodging-house from childhood. He had attached himself to the place one winter's

night, and had never left it: he got no wages, and subsisted upon the perquisites he obtained for his willingness to oblige the people who patronised the fashionable lodging-house, year in and year out. He had never had a name of his own, or, if he had, he had forgotten it when he was on the London streets. In those early days he had seemed to be always hungry; he would gather the broken victuals left by the lodgers, early and late, and eat anything at any time, and so had been dubbed "Vittles" by the servants; and the name clung to him through life. At first the surly old fellow who had charge of the house had striven to drive Vittles away, but the boy clung to his haven of refuge in spite of hard words and harder blows, and made himself so useful, by running errands and doing all kinds of odd jobs, that he won at last a footing for himself. He never asked for, or received, any pay, and he fed himself from the scraps that the lodgers left, and clothed himself in any odds and ends that in their charity they cast in his way; and yet there was no merrier fellow in the world than this poor waif—not that he considered himself poor, since his abode in the lodging-house had been assured. His bitter experience in the London streets before that period had taught him to think himself a monstrously lucky fellow to have a roof over his head. He was honest as daylight, though how he had ever imbibed such principles no one knew; for his childhood had been passed amongst thieves and brawlers and lewd women. He was true to his salt, this waif of the gutter, and looked upon all who lived at the lodgings as beings under his special protection; he knew every hole and corner of the great, unkempt city, knew it so well that he could dart off without an instant's hesitation to any quarter of it. He knew the chairmen who were reliable, and

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the boatmen on the river who could be depended upon. He knew where to obtain a coach at a moment's notice, and a good many other things he knew which only comes to a man in London by a lifetime of residence even in these days. During his residence at the lodging-house he had proved invaluable to many a young blade whose extravagance had led him into trouble, and many a man, fresh from the lanes and green fields of the countryside, had been saved from harpies by Master Vittles. His code of honour was a peculiar pattern; he would not lie to any of the lodgers, but for any of them he would forget that such a thing as the truth existed. He would not fleece any of them of a farthing, but on their behalf he would do his best to beat any tradesman, or chairman, or boatman, or court-runner, in any manner which might suggest itself to his genius. Many and wonderful were the tasks he had been employed upon since he first found a home; but no one had ever been able, by bribes or threats, to seduce him from his duty, for by some strange freak of fortune Vittles had been born honest, and loyalty was as much a part of his nature as his lungs. He got along much better with the guests themselves than with their servants, for he would never aid the latter to rob or cheat their masters, which is a thing your man-servant has rather a common habit of doing. In appearance Vittles was slight and wiry; he might have been a fairly big man, if he had not been starved for the first ten years of his life; but sleeping out in all weathers like a stray dog, and living mostly on air and shoe leather, is apt to stunt growth. In age he was anything between twenty and thirty in appearance, according to the expression upon his face; as to his actual age, he did not know it himself. His father had died in a

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debtors' prison, and his mother had drifted until she became a drab.

When Mr. Thornton first went to live at the lodging-house, Vittles was a good deal younger than at the time this scene took place, and Mr. Thornton had noticed him and watched him; he had even gone to great pains to have Vittles watched and tempted by his agents. The youth's incorruptibility was a source of wonder to the keen man of the world. If Vittles had been a fool he could have understood him better, but that is just what Vittles was not; he was preternaturally sharp, and in his bargaining for his clients he could haggle and wrangle like any fishwife; and when it came to a more material form of dispute than mere words convey, he could hold his own with anything, from a chairman to a bargee, for the streets of a city like London are a good training ground for physical culture. Many a bully, presuming upon the flatness of Vittles' chest and the sloping droop of his rather narrow shoulders, found that appearances are sometimes deceptive; on such occasions Vittles had a habit of interlarding his blows with pungent remarks which always amused the onlookers. Once when he was having what he termed "a little turn-up" with a burly boatman on the banks of the Thames, he would wait for the ponderous blow to be delivered, and then dodge nimbly out of the way, remarking, as he dodged, "Why, guv'ner, you are slow enuff ter be a line o' battle-ship, on'y yer figger 'ead ain't 'andsome enuff; want's paintin', guv'ner, 'and paintin'; think I'll do it fer you for nothink, free gratis, no charge, guv'ner." And then he struck the heavy, slow-moving boatman about a dozen blows in the face with almost lightning quickness, making the fellow look a most gruesome picture. Then, ducking out of danger again, he re-

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marked to the crowd, "Rool hup and see the livin' pictur, 'and painted 'nd true ter natur; wy, ladies and gentlemen, blest if I hav'nt knocked his ugly face into shape, 'e's better lookin' now than 'e ever was in his life."

Vittles was a character, and had a weakness for protecting people who came to lodge with his patron. But of all men living he liked Mr. Thornton the best; perhaps it was because he soon saw that Mr. Thornton was quite capable of taking good care of himself. When Saxon, very highly recommended, had come into Mr. Thornton's service as body-servant, he and Vittles had disagreed at the very outset. In the first place, Saxon, who was a man who had travelled somewhat, and had received an education a good deal above his calling, was inclined to give himself airs with the humble retainer of the house who held a nondescript position, and held that on sufferance. All nonsense of that kind Vittles had treated good-humouredly; he had met that class of servant so often that there was little novelty in it for him. But it was not until he found first that Saxon spied upon his own master, and then sold his information to a Frenchman who lived in Wapping, that Vittles turned openly hostile. He found an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Thornton, and acquainting him with what his servant was doing. "Beg pardin, sir," said Vittles, "but that ere Saxon ain't fair to 'is wages, sir; too fond o' keepin' 'is hear to your door, sir, 'nd too fond o' goin with news to a French chap down Wapping way, sir."

"You mean he spies on me, and sells his information to some Frenchman, eh, Vittles?"

"Couldn't ha' said it no plainer myself, sir."

"H'm; thanks for the information, but I suspected him from the first. He's too well educated for a

body-servant ; body-servants don't read Hebrew, as a rule, do they, Vittles?"

"Mostly they don't read anythink, sir, 'cept it's the Noogate Calendar."

"I hope you have not quarrelled with Saxon, Vittles?"

"Me, sir! bless yer 'eart, not me, sir; 'e asked me if I took 'im fer a spy, 'nd I said, 'No, Mr. Saxon, I don't; I take you fer a dook in disguise, or a markiss at least'; and 'e may be a dook for all I know, Mr. Thornton, but he do have a uncommon fondness for puttin' his ear to a crack in a wall."

"Very well, Vittles. Now I'll tell you something. I have had a doubt of that man all along; the people who recommended him to me caused me to suspect him. Now I must know where he goes. Find out for me the name of the Frenchman in Wapping. I'll take means of my own to know what use the foreigner makes of any information he gleans from me."

A piece of gold to pay for future services passed into Vittles' palm, and from that moment he belonged heart and brain to Mr. Thornton.

That same afternoon Mr. Thornton had carefully placed three books upon his table. One was a work in the French tongue; one was the Old Testament written in the Hebrew tongue; the other a philosophical work in the same language. When Saxon was attending him a little while later, he said to the man carelessly, without looking at the books, "Saxon, pass me the Book of the Divine Law."

Saxon went to the table, glanced at the title of the philosophical work, put it back upon the table, picked up the Old Testament, glanced at it, and handed it to Mr. Thornton.

"That will do, Saxon, thank you."

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The man left the room, and a smile for a second ran around the firm mouth of his master.

"So," he muttered; "my man Saxon can read Hebrew, and he listens at my door, and visits a Frenchman in Wapping. I think this riddle is easy to read, for if he is not one of Fouché's agents, then I know nothing of the methods of the French chief of police. Well, well; Saxon shall keep his place; and documents specially prepared for him shall be left about: it will be a pity to spoil so good a plot."

It was upon the man Saxon, and the messenger, Vittles, that Mr. Thornton gazed when he opened his door. "What is the meaning of this unseemly noise?" he asked, in his quiet, commanding way.

"This fellow is always rude and quarrelsome. I think he is always more than half drunk, sir," answered the body-servant loftily.

Vittles gave the gentleman a meaning look, and said, "Vell, upon my vord, sir, Mr. Saxon his uncommon hard to get on with; I wouldn't 'urt a gentleman's gentleman fer the vorld, sir. I saw him leanin' against your door, sir, and I told him the vall wouldn't fall down even if he didn't keep it hup vith his shoulder; then he showed 'is temper, sir, and I said it was a hugly temper—I said it vas hugly, an' so it vas hugly."

"Please get about your business, and do not annoy me with your wranglings; and Saxon, show this gentleman out," was the austere retort.

Vittles went away outwardly crestfallen, but inwardly chuckling, whilst Saxon did his master's behests with every appearance of outraged dignity. When he had shown the visitor out of the front door into the street, he turned to Vittles, who was leaning disconsolately against the stairhead. "Well," he

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sneered, "you didn't gain much by interfering with other people's business, did you?"

"Not much vorth speaking abart; did you?"

Mr. Saxon ignored the question. "What do you follow me about for; what do you gain by spying on me?"

"Bless yer 'eart, Mr. Saxon, I don't spy on you; I vas only thinkin' of yer 'ealth, sir."

"Thinking of my health; what's the matter with my health, you gutter sneak?"

"Vy the valls in this 'ouse are damp, Mr. Saxon; you shouldn't lean against 'em so much, sir, you really shouldn't."

"What have I ever done to you, fellow, that you should annoy me?"

"Vat. abart the duchess," was the unexpected retort?

"The what?"

"The duchess; you stole 'er from me, Mr. Saxon, and I'll 'aunt yer all yer life."

"You ought to be in Bedlam, man; who do you mean by the duchess?"

"Look at 'er now, vaitin' fer you over the road; she vas mine, all mine. till you stole 'er from me."

Mr. Saxon looked, and a gleam of relief came into his eyes. "So that's what's the matter with you, is it, Vittles? Why, you fool, I only use her to go errands; she's waiting to go to Wapping for me now."

"Oh, is she?" murmured Vittles to himself. "Vell, I've been vantin' to find that out for a month past." But aloud he said, "You've stole 'er 'eart, Mr. Saxon, 'nd you've broke mine."

"Tush, you dolt! I wouldn't touch the wench with the end of my cane; do you think I can't look

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higher than an orange-girl, a drab born in the gutter and reared there."

"You vent hout with 'er last night, Mr. Saxon."

"So you followed me, fellow, did you?"

"I vill follow you to hell if you steal the duchess from me, Mr. Saxon."

"But I tell you, man, I only use her because she is of service to me."

"You valked vith 'er by the river; you took er' vere you thought no heye could see you."

"Well," sneered Saxon; "do you think your precious duchess had never been there before; why, man, she has had more lovers than you have got fingers and toes. I did not think you were a fool. Anyway, the drab is nothing to me but a useful tool."

"Vy do you vant tools; are you a markiss in disguise?"

Mr. Saxon frowned savagely. "No, I'm not; I'm only a servant; but if I could find out something I want to know, I need not be a servant much longer."

"Bow Street," whispered Vittles, in an awed tone; "you ain't a Bow runner, are you, Mr. Saxon?"

"Never you mind what I am, Vittles. I'm able to pay for a service; you ask the duchess if I'm not. And look here, man, if you do as I want you to, it will mean money in your pocket."

"Vy didn't you say so before, Mr. Saxon," answered Vittles. "It ain't in human natur' not to be jealous of a man when you see that man gettin' everythink in the world whilst you get nothink at all. I said to myself, I said, 'Ere's Mr. Saxon gets good wages, 'nd good clothin' 'nd good wittles, 'nd I gets nothink, only cast-offs 'nd broken bits; 'nd then ven you comes along, vy the duchess gives me the cold

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shoulder, 'nd runs after you, Mr. Saxon; 'nd I 'ated you—there now, I 'ated you!”

“And tried to make Mr. Thornton hate me too, eh, Vittles? Well, never mind that now, just run out and tell the duchess I shall not need her to-night.”

CHAPTER IX

THE DUCHESS

IT was one of the faults of the times that intrigue should have permeated all classes of society in England, as well as upon the Continent. Agents of various powers, but more especially French agents, were at work in every hole and corner of England; for the long and ruthless wars that had devastated Europe had bred a spirit of distrust and unrest. Men in power all over the world wanted to know what England intended to do month by month, day by day, and they were not too scrupulous in regard to the means they employed to find out what they required to know. Ruined gentlemen, and gentlewomen too, for that matter, were often in the pay of foreign princes, and their servants were not seldom used to spy upon their masters or mistresses. The servants in their turn used people of a lower grade to do their spying, and so it came about that many a sharp gutter-gamin, or gutter-wench, found employment that brought them much profit if little honour. Amongst this class was a woman familiarly known to her intimates as "the duchess." From childhood the streets had been her home, and there was little that the streets could teach her that she had not learnt. She was ostensibly an orange-seller, but that calling covered a good many others of a less reputable kind.

She was a good-looking young woman of twenty, and had earned her *nom de plume* of duchess, partly on account of her good looks and partly because of her careless and off-hand treatment of her lovers and admirers. To do her justice, she was just as insolent to any young buck who might have taken her fancy at the playhouse, as she was to a boatman whose rude strength had pleased her eye. She was far from being all bad ; in fact, had she been reared amidst happier surroundings, she would in all probability have been a good woman, for she had a strong character, and much individuality ; but the taint of the foulest slums in London was upon her girlhood. Had she been an angel from paradise, she would scarce have escaped being befouled amidst such a life as she had been forced by the iron hand of circumstances to lead. The wonder was not that she had foul spots in her nature, but rather that there was anything in her but foulness.

Like most women she had a love for intrigue, and nothing pleased her better than to take a part, no matter how humble, in any scheme which had a little mystery in it. She not unfrequently found herself employed to watch the movements of people in the lower class of lodging-houses, more especially officers of merchant ships, and passengers who came with them. She was very popular amongst sailors and rough fellows of that class, on account of her face and figure, and her bold, independent speech ; and a hint from her had more than once put some reckless smuggler on his guard, and saved him from the terrors of the law. She did not drink a great deal, though at times she gave way to excess ; but she loved the rude dancing, the fiddling, and the singing, and love-making to be met with on the river's edge.

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She had known Vittles for years, and if there was any love-making between them, it was of the lightly-come lightly-go order of things, for he had known of her mode of life ever since he had known *her*; a waif of the gutter may not know many things that it is essential for a human being to know; but he does know human nature, and knows it as no other human being knows it, for it is thrust upon him as a study every day and every hour of the day. No one would have been more moved to amusement than the duchess herself if she had only heard Vittles' plea of jealousy in his conversation with Mr. Saxon.

To her the lodging-house messenger and odd man was merely a fellow-waif, with whom she was always ready to bandy a jest, for his ready humour appealed to her. She had met the gentleman's gentleman, the lordly Mr. Saxon, at the playhouse in old Drury, and he being in want of someone to carry a message, had entrusted it to her; and so the intimacy, which was far from being as innocent as Mr. Saxon would have Vittles believe, had a beginning. In spite of his very proper manners, in the presence of his master, Mr. Saxon was a profligate of the worst possible kind, and a gamester, a frequenter of cockpits and other resorts of a like kind, where he often betted more money than a serving-man could possibly come by by fair means, all of which was very well known to the duchess.

After awhile Saxon had employed the woman to drop down to a place in Wapping with messages, when he found it impossible to get away from his employer. What the messages were which she conveyed may possibly transpire later in our story. She had not been deceived in any way by Saxon's livery of servitude. She had met and consorted with too

many of his kind in her lifetime not to know that he was in reality a ruined gentleman, playing the part of a servant to suit his own ends and needs. She had guessed as much as this when she first came in contact with him, and her surmise was correct; for the man who masqueraded as Saxon, the body-servant of Mr. Thornton, was a gentleman born, a ruined gamester and hell-rake, a man of learning and much shrewdness, but lamentably weak in moral force. He had reached that stage in the gamester's career when to fill his purse, to enable him to gamble, he would have sold his country's secrets to any foe; or his sister's honour to a libertine, if he could have found a market for his chattels; and yet he looked down with a kind of lofty contempt upon the handsome orange-woman, because she at times sold her body for base uses when pressed by want. The duchess was not a habitual seller of her charms. She seemed far more often to please her eye than to replenish her pocket; but such had been her upbringing, that she would never starve whilst her fine physical appearance could attract the loose gallants of the day. Had she been of the demi-monde, pure and simple, she would have had her own tribe of servants instead of having a basket of oranges upon her arm, but she revolted against the life. She was a courtesan by compulsion, not by desire.

On the night of the visit of the stranger to Mr. Thornton, recorded a few pages back, the duchess and Saxon met, though not by appointment. The place of meeting was the cockpit at the back of the Feathered Arrow Hostel in the Haymarket. This cockpit was a somewhat famous place of resort for young bloods and men about town. Many a good main was fought there, and many a gallant bird was slain. Large sums of money often changed hands

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during a single evening, and all sorts of questionable characters made a habit of frequenting the place, partly in the hope of seeing a good battle, and partly to pluck the golden feathers from the gay birds of fashion who were the principal patrons of the Feathered Arrow cockpit. Women never went there, except one or two privileged orange or flower-sellers like the duchess. But bullies of all sorts and conditions could be found around the pit, from ruffians who for a wager would fight with one another, or fight with dogs, or kill rats with their teeth, up to genteel ruffians, who hung upon the skirts of good society, and stood prepared, for a price, to take up any quarrel for a craven, and fight with either pistols or smallswords. Gentlemen of the road not unfrequently put in an appearance, to bet the contents of the purses they collected upon the road, and, as they usually lost their money in a free-and-easy fashion, they were rather popular than otherwise.

Now, brutal as the sport of cock-fighting may be, there is this to be said for it—that it proves that careful breeding can produce from very ordinary stock a living thing that is not only beautiful, graceful, quick, and strong, but it also demonstrates that if human beings were only careful in the selection of their mates, the world would soon be full of men of much higher mettle than they are to-day; for the English game-cock is the most sublimely brave thing that exists,—brave not merely with the bravery born of ferocity, as the lion or the tiger is brave,—but staunchly brave against odds of weight and size and strength. Nothing that exists, neither man nor bird nor beast, is so unflinchingly, so heroically game as the carefully bred game-cock; and yet, on one side at least, he can always be readily traced back to the dunghill.

This particular night there was a good deal more excitement afoot than usual, on account of a rather peculiar challenge that had been thrown out by a Scotch laird, and accepted by Lord George Paget. The Scot had alleged that the black cock so common in Scotland was a braver bird than the English black-red. He admitted that the black-reds were quicker and better fighters, but he denied their gameness; and, in order to make true his vaunt, he offered to wager a hundred guineas that he would produce three black cocks, bred in Scotland, that could beat any three black-reds bred in England, providing the birds fought with their natural spurs, and not with steel, as was the custom. "Accept that wager," Sir George had cried, "with or without steel I'll back an English bird to beat a Scotch on any hour of the night or day, the best two out of three to decide the main."

"Ay, and I am with you, George," cried Sir Harry Ponsforth, "an English bird against anything north o' the Tweed; ay, or man or horse either, for that matter. At this there had nearly been a brawl, for several Scottish gentlemen, taking offence at the rudeness of the words, sprang to their feet, clapping their hands to their sword hilts. A brawl, with half a dozen duels to follow, seemed about to commence, and was only averted by the reckless tongue of the duchess, who, being determined to prevent a quarrel if she could, turned the whole affair, except the matter of the cock-fighting, into ridicule by exclaiming, in a shrill voice, "Ay, gentles, and if there is any woman in Scotland, laird's wife or fishwife, who thinks she is better than an Englishwoman, why, let her kilt her coats and come along, and I'll wager my virtue against a golden guinea that she'll have nothing to take home with her worth boasting about."

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"You don't risk much in your wagers, duchess," jibed one of the Scots.

"Well, my golden guinea against your virtue, sir," said the duchess.

"Na', na', duchess," laughed another young Scots noble, "we canna' allow such a wager; why, you are laying my cousin a guinea to naething."

The shouts of laughter that greeted this sally cooled all hot blood, and nothing came of it but the cock-fighting.

The pit was nothing but a cleared space in the centre of the floor of a large room. Around the cleared ring, barriers, about a couple of feet high, had been made of stout oaken planks; and it was a rule of the pit that no man should step across the barrier when once the cocks had the floor. Seats were provided for the patrons around the pit; those in the front row were rather low; the second row was a trifle higher; and so on, until the walls of the room were reached. By this means those at the back could see over the heads of those in front without pushing or crowding. The men of high rank and the better-known patrons of the sport had the front seats, whilst the rearward places were filled by men of lesser note. The place was fairly well-lit by means of many tapers, for in such a mixed assembly it would never have done to have allowed the place to be shrouded in shadow.

The Scotsmen, who were in great force, had arrived early and taken up one side of the ring, where Duncan Kennedy, the laird o' Glengarlock's man, was looking after the birds that were to do battle for the honour of Scotland. The English party were not long behind them, Lord George Paget being in command, for he was a keen sportsman, a shrewd better, and a great authority upon all matters per-

taining to sport, and withal so fair and honourable in all his dealings that none ever questioned his word. Quite a large number of well-known men were with him, officers belonging to both army and navy, and other gentlemen who cut a figure in society.

Lord George Paget had chosen for his handler a man named Peter Brown, a fellow who was never absent from any sporting assembly of note. This Peter Brown sold dogs and birds, and trained not only dogs and birds for fighting but men also. He was a rude, rough person, but Lord George was often heard to say that he was incorruptible, and therefore he would rather trust him than many a smooth-spoken man of his acquaintance.

When Peter Brown had received his orders to be ready to visit the Feathered Arrow Hostel and handle the English birds, he looked around for some one to help him, for he could not handle a bird in the pit and look after the others at the same time; he wanted a sharp, shrewd man, who knew something of the sport, and withal a man he could trust, for it would be an easy matter for a knave to do a bird an injury; and knaves were plentiful round a cockpit, as Peter Brown very well knew. By accident he came across Vittles, whom he knew; for the love of sport, from horse-racing to man-fighting, was strong in Vittles. A thing of that kind had to be kept very snug indeed for Vittles not to hear of it; and when it came to gaining admission—why, he trusted to his native wit and his street-arab training to see him through; and he seldom failed to get where many a gentleman with a full purse was foiled.

Peter Brown knew Vittles to be both capable and honest, and hailed him with pleasure. "Vill I come!" was the London lad's reply to the bird-fancier's

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query, "Vill I come!—vill a dog bark? Do you think ve vill vin, Peter?"

"Between you and me, Vittles, I think Lord George have made a error this time."

"Vy, Peter, the English black-red is the best cock that crows."

"Vith the steels, 'e his, Vittles, because he's the quickest cock that's bred, an' vith the steels on, vy, the bird that's first in the air vins nine times out of a dozen, but without the steel the veight vill tell; all the good Scotch cocks go between twelve and sixteen pounds, but the best black-red are between seven and twelve."

"Vy, hain't this main to be fought vith steels?"

"It ought ter be, but it hain't; Sir George was caught nappin' when 'e made this wager; hit's catch weights, that's w'ot it is, Vittles, hand I don't like it; it's hugly, that's w'ot it is, Vittles, it's hugly."

"I did 'ear Captain O'Grady say the Irish cocks were gamer than any that wore feathers, Peter."

Peter grunted contemptuously.

"And a Welsh gent, who was standin' near 'im, said they had cocks in Wales that could give weight to any birds that fly, except heagles."

Peter Brown leant his elbow against a neighbouring wall and spat reflectively at his shadow, then he said, "Some people, Vittles—*some* people—talk o' 'eaven and 'ell, but gi' *me* ole Hingland."

So that was how Vittles came to be at the cockpit at the Feathered Arrow, in the Haymarket, on the night of the never-to-be-forgotten main between the Scottish and English birds,

CHAPTER X

LOVE AND STATECRAFT

THE cares of diplomacy were pressing heavily upon Sir Charles Fiveash, for the strain of the last five years had been tremendous. More than once the genius of Bonaparte had nearly left England isolated, with no one to back her in the tremendous struggle with France. Russia played an in-and-out game. Prussia was ever willing to make the best terms for herself, and had to be bolstered by England. Austria had grown deadly sick of the terrific strain upon purse and blood, Italy was cowed, Denmark was suspicious of England, and Holland was quite willing to let England bear the whole burden.

No wonder the diplomats of the little island were beside themselves, for if Bonaparte could only get his own way, he would close England out of all the markets of the world and ruin both our manufactures and our commerce. Young America looked on with sullen distemper, little dreaming that within the short scope of a hundred years, she, the infant power among the nations, would be dictating commercial terms to the universe at large.

Bonaparte and the Czar of all the Russias had met and had talked for two hours in private upon a raft, on the river Niemen, and as a result the Russians were once more veering round towards a

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distinctly hostile attitude towards England. And no one knew better than Lord Charles, that that cordial understanding would have to be ruptured by some means. Perhaps it was on account of those very difficulties that he was listening, with every sign of pleasure upon his face, to his sister, the Hon. Mrs. Ventner, one morning a few weeks after the ball held at his London house.

"I don't know what your opinion upon the matter is, Charles, but I think it only right that you should know that your daughter's name is being coupled with that of the Russian Prince Otto of Svir all over London," his sister was saying.

"What's that! what's that! God bless my soul, Mary; why, our Jane is only a child yet!"

"Is she, Charles! Do you happen to know that she is nearly twenty? You have been so wrapped up in your precious diplomacy, that you haven't had time to spare to notice your own child going from girlhood to womanhood."

"That's true enough," said the old aristocrat, running his hand wearily over his brows; "it's true enough, Mary; I saw her one hour ago, and to my eyes she looked a baby almost."

"A baby with a very clever head on her shoulders, Charles."

"And you say that Prince Otto of Svir seems taken with her?"

"Taken with her! Why, the man is madly in love with her! It is the talk of half the coffee-rooms in London."

"Ah, indeed, is that really so; what is our Charles about?"

"I don't think, Mary, my dear, that the young bucks of my time would have let their tongues run riot with my sister's name. I must go about more,

I really must; I am not too old even yet to teach some of these people to deal gently with the name of Fiveash."

"Tut, tut, Charles," retorted his sister, "do you think your son cannot take care of the name. Don't, for pity's sake, make him worse than he is; already he has the name of being the most punctilious man in England. He is worse in that respect than you were yourself, and, Lord knows, you were bad enough, Charles; why, a beau scarce dared to propose a toast in my honour, in my young days, but your hand was on your sword hilt, and the boy is as bad."

"We were ever careful of our women-folk's name, Mary, we Fiveashes."

"Yes," retorted his sister, "a good deal more careful of their names than of your own; you were a sad rake, Charles, a sad rake, and I knew it at the time."

"You say this Russian prince seems taken with our Jane."

"La, how many more times, Charles; the man is head and heels in love with her—I'll vouch for that; for I have seen it with my own eyes. I did think for a little time that Constance Stanleigh meant to have him to herself, but she seems to have dropped him, or he has dropped her; it amounts to the same thing."

"He comes of a great family, and he is in the confidence of his master, the Czar; your news pleases me, Mary."

"I am glad to know it, I had fancied you had other designs for Jane."

"Why?"

"Because Captain George Fiveash, her cousin, had the run of your house."

"He is her cousin, and though a pauper I could not close my door to him."

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"If you mean to marry Jane to Prince Otto, you will be wise to see that the captain does not mar your plans."

"The poor fellow cannot keep himself, let alone a wife."

"You seem to forget that Jane is a great heiress in her own right; whoever marries her will marry a fortune."

"Pish," said my lord testily, "Captain George Fiveash is not a madman, I hope; and no one not a Bedlamite, in his position, would dare raise his eyes to my daughter."

"I like the man, Charles; he is a good fellow and a gallant seaman."

"Of course, of course," answered the old noble; "what else would you expect of a Fiveash, Mary? He is a gentleman and a gallant sailor, and will, I hope, make some progress in his profession; he would not be a Fiveash if he were a wastrel."

"Get him promoted to something good, Charles; something that will take him away to foreign parts for five or ten years."

Lord Charles raised his small, beautifully shaped right hand.

"Hush, Mary, you speak lightly, as all women do; but let me tell you this—I have served my king and country all my life, and I have never yet pushed my own fortunes, or the fortunes of one nearly related to me; and I would scorn to do such a thing. I have done what I might for England, out of pure love for England; I will never lower myself to ask a favour for one of my own race and name. If the man has it in him to rise he will rise; if not, he must remain what he is, or sink even lower; but I would not lift my voice, if by so doing I could make him Admiral of the British fleet."

"Well, well," said his sister sharply, "let it be so; I only hope you won't live to regret it. I don't like the idea of cousins marrying—it weakens the blood and lowers the race; and on that account, if for no other reason, I shall keep an eye on Jane and the sailor."

"Pooh, pooh; dismiss him from your mind, Mary. Tell me about the prince, does he seek an alliance with our house, do you think?"

"I don't know what his ideas are concerning an alliance with the house of Fiveash, Charles; but he will marry Jane, if you will give her to him, or marry her whether you give her to him or not, if she is willing. The man is half a barbarian, in spite of his rank."

Lord Charles sat and mused for many minutes; then, looking at his sister, he remarked, "This is the best news I have heard for many a long month, Mary, for if Prince Otto of Svir wants to marry my child, it clearly indicates that his imperial master, the Czar, is not ill-disposed towards England; for the prince would not be seeking an alliance with an English family if his country was likely to go to war with ours."

"Your life is wrapped up in statecraft, Charles."

"I think it is, Mary, I think it is; but you will admit the soundness of my deductions. If the Czar was really determined to throw in his lot with Bonaparte, Prince Otto of Svir would surely know it, and would not now be seeking my daughter."

"You would consent to the union then, Charles?"

"Consent, Mary; I should be one of the happiest men in England, if I knew for a certainty that it was to come to pass."

"Poor little Jane!"

"And why poor little Jane, pray; is it not a

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match worthy of her? Prince Otto is a man of unbounded wealth and of high military repute; he could seek an alliance where he would, even the blood-royal would scarce veto him."

"I was thinking of his heart, not of his estate, Charles."

"We who move in the upper circle, Mary, have something to consider besides our sentiments; did I marry for what the vulgar call love? Did you, Mary?"

The elderly woman, with the hair that looked like a sable silvered, placed one of her thin white wrinkled hands upon her brother's, and her eyes were less bright than usual as she replied, "No, Charles, no, neither of us did that; we, you and I, sacrificed ourselves upon the family altar. You, to serve our family, wedded a fashionable fribble, who had nothing in common with you; and I, well, I gave my life into the keeping of a worn-out roué. I often wonder if we have done the best we might have done with our lives, Charles. I know I envy every cottage wench I see going to meet her lover; and you, if you had not had your precious statecraft to fall back upon, your life would not have been worth living at all. I fancy, Charles, that if I had my time over again I would not do as I have done."

His hard old eyes grew soft; he thought of the gay young soldier of fortune who had vainly wooed his sister in the old, old days; the lover who was sent about his business because he had little beside a handsome face and a shapely figure to offer, and he sighed. "Poor Mary," he murmured, and he stroked the withered hand that lay on one of his.

"Ay," she said, with just a trace of tears in her voice, "it has been poor Mary this many a year; is it to be poor Jane in the years to come?"

He braced himself at once. "Ah, my dear, that is different, if Jane goes to Prince Otto of Svir, England will have a firm, unbendable ally near the throne in St. Petersburg, and that, Mary, may make all the difference between peace and war. If you had to live your life again, you would give up all you held dear for England's sake, you know you would."

She nodded that silvery head of hers. "We love our country dearly, we men and women of the Five-ash blood," she said. Then rising, with another sigh, "Poor Jane," she whispered, "poor little Jane." For this patrician dame had taken an intense dislike to Otto, Prince of Svir; she had seen below the veil a hand's-breadth; and well she knew that there was no bed of roses in store for her pretty Jane, if she shared his bridal bed.

On her way to the door she met her nephew, who was at that moment going to visit his father. After the first salutation was over, she remarked, "Well, Charles, you grow more and more like your father every day; I don't believe you ever had a childhood or a boyhood; come now, tell me, did you ever laugh heartily in all your life?"

"Am I so dull that you ask me, aunt?"

"Dull! no, that is the worst of you; you are never dull; you are mostly brilliant when you do condescend to talk, which is not often, but you always keep a guard upon yourself. You are never indiscreet, you have no young man's merriment. Then, with a sudden burst of passion, she leant forward and touched him upon the cheek, with a bony finger, "Charles Fiveash, be guided by me, don't waste your life, as your father and grandfather and great-grandfather wasted theirs; throw statecraft to the devil, Charles, and enjoy your own life—you will be an old man soon enough."

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With that warning she passed on, and the young man mused as he made his way to his father's room, "I wonder what has got on Aunt Mary's nerves to-day." He was soon to know, for scarcely had he seated himself in the presence of his father ere the old man commenced to question him concerning the Russian prince.

"You see a good deal of Prince Otto of Svir, do you not, Charles.

"A good deal, sir."

"How does he impress you, Charles?"

"He is much as other men of his rank and nationality are, sir."

"Is he a gamester?"

"Within bounds, yes, sir; but he would never let his passion for play run away with him."

"I think I understand you, Charles, because I knew his father. Play is a passion with him, but when it reaches a certain stage it freezes hard as ice on the Neva."

"He is just that sort of gamester, sir."

"Have you any idea concerning his mission to England; a man of his importance would scarcely be idling in London at a time like this, if he had not some definite object in view."

"He seems, sir, to be trying to understand our habits, our pleasures, our government, and our national character."

"It is to be hoped that he has fallen into the hands of a good set of people; it is of the highest importance, Charles, that he should send a good report of us to his imperial master and to his own set in Russia. Who does he associate with principally?"

"Sir George Paget and his immediate friends, as a rule, sir."

“Ah, said the old lord, Sir George is a deuce of a rake, but he is a fine fellow for all that; the prince may not improve his morals over-much in such society, but he will see all there is worth seeing in England, if he keeps close to Paget. Then, as if struck by an afterthought, he asked carelessly, “Is there any truth in the town-tattle concerning a love-affair that may lead to a marriage between the prince and”—

“I do not think so, sir; I certainly hope that you have not given that matter any serious thought.”

“I have not given it very much consideration as yet, Charles; but you can rest assured that the match shall have all the encouragement that I can give it.”

“And the match, as you term it, sir, shall have all the opposition that I can place in its way?”

“Are you mad, Charles? such a marriage would be of more help to us in our diplomacy than anything that could happen.”

“The fellow is not good enough for her, sir.”

“Perhaps not, Charles, perhaps not; very few of us are good enough for a woman, who is any good? But the match must be encouraged at all hazards. Our influence is wavering every hour in St. Petersburg, and we must not let an opportunity like this slip for making up lost ground.”

Now, though neither of them knew it at the time, the two men were arguing from different standpoints. Charles Fiveash thought that his father was referring to a marriage between Prince Otto of Svir and the woman he loved, Constance Stanleigh; whilst his father, knowing nothing of the flirtation between that pair, thought that his son was opposing a marriage between his sister and the prince.

“I can assure you, sir,” said Charles emphatically, “that I shall do all in my power to discourage this match.”

"Think of your country, Charles."

"Damn my country, sir; are we, Fiveashes, to lay all we possess upon the altar of patriotism? Is nothing to be held sacred; are we to send the women we love to the shambles, for the sake of patriotism? I will yield my intellect, my life if need be, to my country; but I will not barter a woman I love and esteem for such a cause; and I tell you frankly, sir, that if this matter is pushed by you, as the head of our house, I will do my best to render the effort abortive; if need be I will insult the prince and force him to fight me—you at least will have to hold your hand."

"Leave the room, sir," thundered the old man springing from his chair, "leave the room this moment, or I may forget that you are my son, and order my servants to cast you into the street."

With a frigid bow Charles Fiveash left his father's presence, left it for the first time in his life in anger; and the house of Fiveash was divided against itself.

The daughter of the house, the innocent cause of all the trouble, was deeply pained when she learned of the estrangement between her father and her brother; she knew the unbending nature of both, and feared for the consequences. At first she tried to wheedle from the old man the cause of the estrangement, but he was as adamant—he would tell her nothing. Then she tried her brother, and was astounded to learn that Constance Stanleigh was the cause of all the trouble; so, like a dear good sister, she determined to make that match impossible, by weaning the prince entirely from his allegiance to the stately Constance, little dreaming that her every act only widened the breach between her father and her brother. To this end she made life far more pleasant to the Russian prince in London than it would other-

wise have been. She did not coquette with him ; but it must be frankly admitted that she gave him far more of her company than she would have done had she known the true state of affairs. Her wit, her beauty, and the charm of her manner, kept Prince Otto near her far more than Mr. Thornton either liked or desired ; but he was far too wise a man to show his hand until all the cards were ready for playing. He stood aloof and watched, waiting for a favourable moment to intervene.

To any onlooker it must have seemed that the course of love between the Prince of Svir and Lady Jane Fiveash was running very smoothly indeed, for the gentleman was ardent, and the lady apparently willing. Captain George had gone off to his ship in great distemper, inwardly praying that the Russians might join the French against England, so that he might at least have the pleasure of killing a few of them, even if he never had the chance of striking a blow at the man he had learned to hate.

Charles Fiveash was perhaps the most unhappy man of all concerned, for he could not fail to note that Constance Stanleigh, the woman he loved, left no stone unturned to win the prince's favour. He saw very plainly that the prince sought his sister, whilst the woman he was willing to die for sought the prince. He did not know that it was her ambition, not her heart, that prompted her to go to such lengths to court the Muscovite's favour. With him diplomacy was a duty ; he had been reared for it, trained for it and bred for it ; but with her it was a passion, a path to power. Her open and undisguised preference for him flattered the prince, and he took great pleasure in her society ; for, like Charles Fiveash, he thought it was his personal magnetism, not his projects, which attracted her ; and yet night and day

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the ambitious woman intrigued to find out what his real intentions were towards England. If she could discover that secret, and lay proofs before the eyes of the sages who controlled England's destiny, her fortune was made; she would have a salon of her own and be a power, a factor in the destiny of Empires. She had marvelled when she saw the attitude of the Lady Jane towards the prince, but soon came to the conclusion that her English friend was in love with the magnificent animal qualities of the foreigner. She looked disdainfully upon all loves and lovers, for to her it seemed that power was the only thing on earth worth fretting and striving for. It was not for the prince's sake that she learned to dislike the Lady Jane, but for the sake of the prince's secret; if she could have won his affections for herself, she flattered herself that she would soon have been in possession of his secret. As it was she managed to get little scraps of information which she diligently pieced together, though this patchwork was of little worth to her. She knew that she would have to have a complete story to tell, and have proofs that could not be questioned to back it, before she ventured to claim any reward for herself. Lord Fiveash looking on at the game of life was more than ever incensed against his son.

"Arrant folly for Charles to talk of sacrificing his sister to the prince; why, the child is ears over head in love with the man, though, begad, I can't, for the life of me, tell what she can see in him to admire beyond his big figure; yet, to hear Charles talk, one would think his sister was being forced with a dog whip to marry a man she hated; can't think what has come over the boy. I expect he has taken a violent prejudice against his sister's lover, and if that

is so, why he must learn to swallow his whimsies, for marry the man our little Jane must and shall; though I had always hoped that, when it came to marrying, she would have found a mate amongst our good English families. But diplomacy knows no law."

CHAPTER XI

MR. THORNTON VISITS HIS VISITOR

NOT very long after the serving-man Saxon had tried to corrupt Vittles, that queer personage had sought and found an opportunity to have a little conversation with Mr. Thornton; Saxon was out of the way on some errand of his own.

"You have something to tell me, Vittles," said Mr. Thornton, in his clear, low voice.

"Vell, sir, vether it's vorth knowin' or not, I hain't the one to say; but I thought you'd like to know, sir, that the horange-girl they call the duchess his in the pay of your precious gentleman, Mr. Saxon."

"In what manner does he employ her?"

"She takes messages for 'im, sir, when 'e can't take 'em 'imself; an' I think she keeps a heye on some one else for 'im, sir. E's a lovely fresh bit o' butter, Mr. Saxon is, sir; I vonder you don't vant 'is room more than 'is company, sir, if I may make bold to say it."

"He's a precious knave, Vittles; but if I get rid of him, those who employ him will find other means of watching me; and, you see, it's a comfort to me to know who this spy is, for I can watch him, and that is a very great advantage."

Vittles intimated that if he had his will he would

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like five minutes in private with Mr. Saxon; but Mr. Thornton checked his exuberant fancy by pointing out to him that personal violence seldom did any good in the long-run. "Brain force is better than muscle force, Vittles; learn to outwit your enemy, and bring him to grief, if he persists in being an enemy; it is better than more brutal methods." Vittles replied that he liked to outwit an enemy first, and he continued, "Ven Hi 'ave shamed 'im with hintellect Hi loves to 'ammer his 'ead arf off; ven, hif he don't feel the shame, 'e feels the 'ammering; an' if 'e do feel the shame, why, sir, I scores off 'im in both ways."

"You know this orange-woman very well, don't you, Vittles?"

The man grinned. "Vell, sir, the duchess hain't a 'ard party to know; she is more happroachable than some."

"Where are you going to-night?"

"To the Feathered Arrow cockpit, sir, to 'elp 'andle some birds."

"A cruel pastime, Vittles."

"Lord, no, sir; they likes it."

"Do *you* like fighting, Vittles?"

Vittles grinned. "I haint haverse to a little turn-up myself, sir, specially on a frosty mornin', if the weights are ekell, or anything near ekell; though I don't mind giving away 'arf a stun or a stun to a boatman or a bargee—they are mostly slow, an' speed wins in a turn-up, sir."

"Well, that is hardly in my line, but I should like you to try and gain the favour of this woman you call the duchess. I want to know all there is to know concerning Mr. Saxon's friends. He is playing a bigger game than you are aware of; but," added Mr. Thornton, with a smile, "you are hardly

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dressed to take the eye of a lady like the duchess, Vittles."

"My shorts are a bit vorn, sir; you see, sir, they are leather, an' I ain't had no new ones for years. Bless your heart, sir, I growed in them shorts; they was like bags on me when I first got 'em, sir; and now I'm afraid to take 'em off, for fear I couldn't get into 'em again."

"Well, I have some of mine that might suit you, Vittles; but that would never do. Saxon knows every rag I possess, and he might grow suspicious of you if he saw you in my things; besides, he claims all my cast-off things as his perquisites: better buy some clothes, Vittles." As he spoke Mr. Thornton drew forth his purse, "Better not look too smart, my man, but make yourself passable; and here is something to spend on the duchess. I suppose I am doing no harm to her morals, poor thing?"

"Don't worry about that, sir; 'er morals is like my shorts, she 'as grown in 'em; Hi can't do 'er no 'arm, and she can't do me no hinjery."

That night, owing to Mr. Thornton's generosity, Vittles faced the world in a decent suit of clothes, for the first time. Peter Brown, the dog and bird-fancier, was slightly suspicious when he saw his helper.

"I say, Wittles," he remarked severely; "'ow did you come by them clothes?"

Vittles scented the suspicion in his voice, and his gorge rose. "'Ow did I come by 'em? why, the Dook o' Hargyle 'eard o' me from my friend the Lord Mayor o' London, an' 'e sent 'em down ter me from Scotland. Don't you like the look of 'em, Peter, cause if you don't I'll take 'em away hat once; I hain't hanxious to take hup room that might be more use if another man 'ad it."

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"Pity the Dook o' Hargyle didn't send a coat o' harms has well, to set your ludship hup in life, since you're so dam peppery," was Peter's retort; "if your going to 'elp me 'andle them cocks, why, come and do it. If you are going to put on hairs, you'd best go and arsk my Lord Paget wot 'e means by wearin' ruffles on his shirt without arsking your leave."

But it is our duty at present to follow Mr. Thornton. Early in the evening Saxon had asked him if his services would be required that night, and, being told that he would not be needed, had asked for permission to spend the night upon an errand of his own. "You have a sick relative, I believe, Saxon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is she any better than when you visited her last?"

"I fear she is dying, sir."

"Ah, that is sad; she is young, quite a girl, in fact, from what you told me."

"Very little more than a girl, sir."

"And there is no hope for her?"

"None, I fear, sir."

"Ah, well, you need not hurry your return; it is your duty to do all you can to comfort the dying."

Hardened and accomplished liar as Saxon was, his eyes quailed before the steady kindly glance of his master. He knew that there was no sick relative waiting for his kindly visit, and he knew also that if there had been, he was the last man on earth to waste his time by a dying woman's bedside. He had invented the sick relation as an excuse for his frequent absence from home, and he really fancied he had duped his master.

He went out shortly after, not to a bed of suffering, but to the cockpit of the Feathered Arrow. As soon

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as he had disappeared, Mr. Thornton passed out of a back door which led to a narrow lane; and with his cloak folded so that it hid his face, and his hat drawn well down over his brows, with his hand on the hilt of his sword, hurried to the river's edge and engaged a boatman—not that this was the quickest way to get to his destination, but it was the surest way to avoid being followed; and for very many reasons he did not desire to be followed.

As soon as the boatman had shot his craft well out on to the dark breast of the Thames, Mr. Thornton looked long and earnestly to see if any one was upon his heels. "Cease rowing," he whispered to the man, and instantly the oars lay on the lap of the waters, for the boatmen of the old river knew their business thoroughly. Mr. Thornton listened and looked,—no sound, no sight, nothing but the long black ribbon of water rippling between its banks. He gave another order, and the boatman sped on for a quarter of an hour in the very centre of the river; no one could tell which bank he meant to make for, not even the boatman. At the expiration of the time mentioned, he stopped his boat again, and looked and listened—nothing, not a sound. "Pull in," he said shortly and sharply, speaking like a man who well knew how to command obedience when necessary.

The boatman pulled in and landed his passenger on the same side of the river as that from which he had started. He gave the fellow a fare that caused him to touch his hat.

"I don't think we have been followed," he said; "but if we have been, and you are questioned, you can say you put me ashore a mile lower down. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir; good luck go with you, sir."

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“Thanks, good-night ; we may meet again. I often want a boat and a silent boatman, and I never forget a face.”

With that Mr. Thornton stepped briskly away, and was soon lost in the darkness. He was full of caution, this man who held more than one man's life at his finger-ends. He entered a low-looking eating-house, a common haunt of sailors of the poorer class. It was dimly lighted and dirty ; he did not say a word, but giving a curt nod to the man at the door, a short squarely built Hebrew, he made his way to a back-room, unlocked the door with a key he took from his pocket, entered the dark door, and locked the door behind him ; then, for the first time, he seemed to breathe easily. Striking a light, by means of flint and steel, he lit a miserable rushlight, and, going to a panel in the wall, threw it back and drew forth a bundle of clothes. Hastily doffing his own, he pulled on a complete sailor dress, and then, pushing his own things into the hole in the wall, he pulled back the panel, blew out the light, unlocked the door, and slouched out into the passage, completely disguised as a seafaring man. As he reached the side-walk a couple of women of the notorious class came to him, and one getting on each side, they linked their arms in his, and began making boisterous love to him. He permitted this for a little time, because it fitted in with his plans ; but when they attempted to drag him into one of the low drinking dens, in front of which they were passing, he shook them off roughly and made off ; but the women were not so easily got rid of. Again they came to him, and once again they took hold of his arms ; but, feigning anger, he thrust them away, and then they fell to abusing him ; and one began to scream out that the sailor had robbed her ;

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and at that a crowd of rough fellows of the gutter tribe collected round him and threatened to do him injury if he did not restore the woman her money, though they knew well enough she had lost nothing. But, thinking the sailor had his pay upon him, they were ready for any excuse that would enable them to share in the plunder; for fellows of their kind subsisted partly on the gains made by women of the abandoned class, and partly on the robbery of the sailors. Their methods were very well known to Mr. Thornton, and he therefore did not attempt to parley with them, as sailors nearly always did; but, rushing at one fellow, he hit him with his clenched fist with all his force, knocking the ruffian backwards; then, taking to his heels, he ran swiftly forward and soon distanced the harpies, who did not follow him with any good heart, for they were a cowardly set of rascals, as a general rule, and did not care to attack any man unless he was far gone in liquor, or unless they could come upon him unawares.

As soon as he had shaken off the pursuit, Mr. Thornton settled down into a swift walk, for he was a very fine pedestrian, and it was not long before he reached the place he sought, a small coffee-house in an obscure street. Entering boldly he called for refreshments, and a lad with a distinctly Hebrew face answered his summons. There was no one else in the eating-room at the time, so, dropping his voice to a whisper, he said to the lad, "Nathan, what room is the stranger in who came to you to-day?"

The lad smiled. "I knew you, sir," he said, "your disguise is good; but you forgot to take the ring off your left hand; and I knew you by that as soon as you came into the light."

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An exclamation of annoyance broke from the gentleman's lips. "Thanks, Nathan, your eyes are sharp, and I deserved to be ducked in a ditch for my folly." He drew off the ring and put it in his pocket. "Now, what room is the stranger in?"

"The second on the left side, after you get on the first landing."

"Is it a safe room?"

"No, there is not a safe room in the house; there are two peeping panels in that room, and anything that is said or done can be seen and heard from outside."

"You had better come with me and let me see them."

"Yes, sir."

It was very evident that the people of the coffee-shop were in Mr. Thornton's pay, for the lad returned in a minute or so and conducted him to the room mentioned as number two on the left.

The lad Nathan was about to knock at the door when Mr. Thornton stopped him. "Show me first where are the peeping panels?"

Nathan went on tiptoe to the wall and ran his fingers along the rough surface with a deftness born of long practice, and soon found what he sought; then he made a downward movement with his hand, and slid a tiny panel not much bigger than a needle out of its place. It was very small, and yet so admirably situated that it gave an excellent view of two-thirds of the room. Mr. Thornton looked through the peeping panel and saw the man who had that morning called upon him. He was reading a letter written upon parchment, and seemed determined, by the way he knitted his brows as he read, to commit its contents to memory. With a half-smile upon his face Mr. Thornton closed the panel

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and whispered the lad to take him to the other one. This Nathan did, and Mr. Thornton saw that it commanded all the rest of the room. "Go to the door and knock," he said simply.

Nathan slipped speedily to the door and rapped sharply. The man on the inside started, and lifting a cane that stood by his chair disjoined it about the middle; then rolling his parchment deftly, he slipped it into the hollow cane and jointed the cane again. He did this so rapidly that Mr. Thornton had scarce time to follow his movements with his eye. Then the man rose and walked slowly to the door; as he did so, Mr. Thornton closed the panel and passed swiftly to Nathan's side. "Watch this room, and give me warning if anyone comes near it," he commanded sharply, and motioned the lad away.

The door opened slowly and cautiously, "Who is there?" asked a voice.

Mr. Thornton bent his face close to the doorway and muttered a word almost below his breath, and the door was thrown open and he entered. As soon as he was alone with the stranger he fell upon his neck, and the pair embraced with every sign of love and cordiality; for the stranger was the youngest of the seven sons of the house of Gotschalk, and therefore Mr. Thornton's youngest brother.

After the greeting the pair sat down to talk; and Mr. Thornton said, "You have a message, a written message inscribed on vellum in the hollow of the cane you carry, brother Benjamin?"

The younger man started. "I have such a message, and it is hidden as you say; but how did you know that, brother?"

Mr. Thornton shook a warning finger at him. "I thought, Benjamin, that your experiences in Russia would have made you more careful. I was watching

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you read before my knock aroused you, and I saw you hide that precious parchment. Men who carry their own lives in the hollow of their hands should be careful, Benjamin; but men who carry the lives of others in their hands, should be as wary as weasels. If the deadly enemy of all our people should ever learn that we were working against him, he will fill the cup of sorrow for every Hebrew in all Russia."

"He does that as it is," was the bitter reply; "only the week before he left he made the streets of St. Petersburg red with Jewish blood, taking as an excuse a gathering of our people at a festival. He charged through them at the head of his dragoons, and cut down young and old, and trampled women and children under the hoofs of his horses."

A great wave of wrath swept over Mr. Thornton's fine face. "The accursed one, the thrice-accursed one; he and his shall yet pay for all this innocent blood!"

It is weary work waiting," replied the younger man; "in Russia the Moujiks say, 'God has forgotten Israel.'"

Mr. Thornton lifted his hands threateningly above his brother's head. "That is the voice of fools whispering amidst the snowflakes; know this, thou son of Israel, 'The Watcher on the tower never wearies.'"

It might have been the voice of old Eli Strassgood echoing down the generations,—such power, such passion, such glorious faith rang in the sibilant whisper.

Benjamin bent his head, humbled and rebuked, and for a time there was silence between the brothers.

"Give me the parchment, brother?"

Benjamin Gotschalk drew forth the document, and handed it to his elder. It was written in Greek

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characters. As he read, Mr. Thornton's face grew almost luminous. When he had finished he leant forward until both his hands rested upon his brother's knees, and his face was within three inches of his brother's. "Tell me *all* now, Benjamin?"

"The parchment contains an exact copy of the instructions sent by the Czar of Russia to Otto, Prince of Svir, now in London. The messenger who bears it will arrive in London by to-morrow at noon, and he will leave London on his return journey to St. Petersburg, forty-eight hours later, and carry to his imperial master whatever message Prince Otto of Svir may have to send; Prince Otto will write in cipher."

"And the key to the cipher?"

"It will be sent by another messenger; that must be your work."

"No man, woman, or child shall go near the prince for the next ten days whose every movement I shall not know, and the cipher key shall come into my hands; my system is perfect and cannot fail. Who is the imperial courier who is to arrive to-morrow?"

"Count Plovodiskie."

"Is he an instrument of ours?"

"Yes."

"By purchase or by interest?"

"By both purchase and interest."

"Explain?"

"The Count first lost a greater part of his possessions by gambling; he is a gamester of the worst order. He sought to remake his fortunes by marriage with a woman of Poland; but this was prevented by the secret influence of Prince Otto with the Czar; so Count Plovodiskie hates both Czar and Prince. All this our agents knew, and when the

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Count was most in need of money our agents bought him."

"Can we trust a traitor?"

"He is so deeply in the mire, he dare not play us false."

"He sells his own country, he may sell us to France?"

"We must bid higher than France."

"I think we will."

"Now, good-night, my brother; for I must go far and do much before I sleep."

The younger man rose and the brothers embraced, and once more Mr. Thornton went out into the night.

CHAPTER XII

THE COCKPIT OF THE FEATHERED ARROW

THE company present in the cockpit of the Feathered Arrow Hostel was more numerous than select on the occasion of the great battle between the English and Scotch birds, though there were very many men present who figured largely in history later on.

The two factions formed two complete camps. The Scots, and those who intended to back the Scottish birds, had one side of the room pretty much to themselves, whilst Lord Paget's party had the other. The gentry, for the most part, occupied the front rows on both sides, excepting in the immediate vicinity of the corners where the birds were to be handled. There the handlers and their attendants reigned supreme; but here and there, even in the foremost row, some gay ruffler had managed to push himself who had but little right to be there. Peter Brown, who had his arrangements made early, had plenty of leisure to look round him, whilst the gay young bloods of fashion on either side were making and booking wagers. Suddenly he touched Vittles upon the arm. "Well, I'm dashed!" he exclaimed; "look at that chap close hup to the ring near the Scots birds."

Vittles looked in the direction indicated, and saw a tall elegantly made man, neatly but fashionably

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dressed, balancing a purse of gold in his palm, whilst he made bets across the ring with the Marquis of Kinglake.

"W'ot may 'is name be?" queried Vittles.

"Dunno wot 'is real name is, but 'is game is night-ridin'; that's 'Ighway Jack, 'nd it's odds on that 'e lifted the purse 'e 'as in 'is 'ands from some one last night."

Vittles stared open-mouthed for a while at the famous night-rider.

"Vy, Peter, 'e looks a thoroughbred," said he.

"Well, and p'raps 'e is a thoroughbred; lots of 'em cut up rough when the luck o' the cloth goes against 'em; an' wot they drop over the table they pick up on the road. An' there, look down there; see that chap with the cherry-coloured westcoat? 'E's another 'igh Toby—only 'e's small fry yet. I 'aven't seen 'im about for the last year or more—thought 'e 'ad got nabbed or got shot."

Vittles followed Peter's fingers with his eyes, and, lifting his gaze from the cherry-coloured waistcoat, found himself gazing full into the face of no less a person than Mr. Saxon.

"Vy, Peter, you must be dreamin'; you'll be tellin' me the duchess is the daughter o' a prince o' the blood next."

"Shouldn't fall down dead with astonishment if I was to 'ear that, Vittles; 'er mother was the 'andsomest woman in London twenty 'ear ago. Many a drab's brat born in the Fleet 'ad a earl's blood in their veins, I can tell you."

"Yes; but that 'igh Toby you pointed hout to me is my gentleman's gentleman; that's the Mr. Saxon I vos tellin you about."

"Oh, 'e his, his 'e. Well, 'e wos night-ridin' a year ago—I'll take my oath on that. But, Wittles, you

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hain't goin' ter split on 'im. It's my perfession to be 'onest, and, Wittles, it's part o' my perfession ter 'elp any man dodge the runners. If you catch 'im up to any of 'is 'igh Toby tricks with your gentleman, why, do your worst with 'im, but no splittin' to the runners. My! 'ere's a blade I don't know; 'e's big enough—ever seen 'im before, Wittles?"

"No," answered Vittles; then he dropped an oath.

"W'ot's 'appinin to you," growled Peter. "Them brand-new second-hand clothes o' yours seem to have upset you."

"Tell you v'ot, Peter; I think the big man's 'igh Toby, too; I saw him nod to my Mr. Saxon."

"Too big a man for night-ridin'," answered Peter reflectively; "too much weight; couldn't get an 'orse in London to carry 'im ten mile an hour, on a muddy road. No, Wittles, long an' light is the make fer night-ridin'."

At that juncture Sir George Paget pushed up to Peter Brown, and said, "The Scots are going to start with a sixteen-pound bird. What shall we put against it, Brown?"

"Try 'im with a twelve-pound cock, my lord, an' see 'ow it works."

"They have an eighteen-pounder for the last flutter, Brown."

"I wish it was with the steel on, my lord."

"So do I now, Brown; but we must go on. You say you know the birds you have brought."

"Yes, my lord, but the weights are all against us. I 'ave a twelve-pound bird, an' a ten-pound bird, an' a cock that tips the scale at eight-an'-a-'arf, my lord, an' I'll back 'em against anything their weight that crows"—

"Beg parding, my lord; but if I vos 'andlin' 'em, I'd put the little 'un against the big 'un."

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Vittles had put in his word boldly, for he was a judge.

“Why?”

The crisp question fell from Lord Paget's lips like ice.

“Vell, you can't put veight against veight, because you ain't got the veight; so I say, put speed against veight; the 'eavy bird will be a slow bird. With a bit of luck I think ve'll vin, my lord.”

“That's London logic,” retorted his lordship, with a laugh. “A smart little 'un against a slow big 'un. Well, well, we've got precious little choice.”

At that moment the big gallant whom Vittles had seen nod across the ring to Saxon called out an offer to wager.

“'E's a big 'un, anyway,” said Peter Brown, whose critical eye roved admiringly over the magnificent proportions of the man in front of him. “May I harsk your lordship who the big gent is?” he continued, with the freedom of the sporting fraternity.

Lord Paget half turned his head. “That; oh, that's a Russian noble, the Prince of Svir. Now then, Peter Brown, do your best for England to-night. I see the enemy is ready. Get your bird in hand.”

There was a babel of sound, the tapers flaring down upon flushed or pallid faces. The Scots handler was upon his knees by the ring-side, a great black cock balanced between his hands. Hoarse voices bawled bets in guineas or in hundreds. Cold, clear, sharp, incisive voices answered the rougher tones.

The Scots handler tossed his bird into the ring. It fell firmly upon its great yellow feet, balanced itself on its big, thick, straight legs, and swelled out its splendid breast. It was a perfect bird of its sort, jet-black of feather, coal-black of eye, sixteen pounds

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weight, and as hard as a piece of mountain ash. There was something of the eagle in its look and poise—the perfect balance of the body, the broad back and short heavy wing, the long, rather coarse neck, and the head that might have been bred in an eagle's eyrie. This was no novice in the ring, for the great cock, looking round with its eyes of flame, suddenly sent a clarion challenge ringing out upon the air. It was the moment Peter Brown, craftiest of handlers, had waited for. As the first note pealed out from the Scottish bird's pulsing breast, he slipped a gleaming reddish-black or blackish-red cock over the barrier into the ring with deft hands, and let it go on the run.

There was no answering challenge, no bugle speaking to bugle. Like a streak of red flame the English bird darted upon the challenger, and, rising high, struck inwards and downwards. Had there been steel on those bony spurs, the fight would have ended there and then; as it was, the black cock felt the shock, and staggered, but only for a moment. Then, with necks stretched out to the full, and plumage ruffled, the champions faced each other, feinting for an opening to strike, like well-trained swordsmen. Now the red would thrust its head far out, and the black would strike with ponderous beak at the narrow snake-like skull; but the red head would dart aside, and the red body go into the air, and the bony spurs strike swiftly and cruelly. From first to last the methods of the birds were different. The English bird, with its pheasant strain strong in its blood, fought almost entirely in the air, relying upon its speed for victory. The Scots bird struck heavily and often with its great cruel-looking curving beak, always striking for the centre of the head with swift downward blows that made the

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lighter bird stagger and reel. Now and again, when the red head slid from side to side in puzzling motions, the black cock would charge forward and grip the neck or throat of its adversary in a fierce grip, and bear the lean head to the floor, and then strike sudden and sharp with the beak. But the English bird would rise with magical swiftness, with its head behind the enemy's jet-black shoulder, and wait with panting straining breast and unflinching eye for the black cock's next move. Then the black, feeling that the battle was going in its favour, would rise and strike, but clumsily, heavily, vainly. At last they rose together, and the black's spurs struck the red throbbing breast, and, weight telling, the English bird went reeling over the floor, and fell upon its side. Just then Vittles happened to look up into the face of Lord Paget. The noble's face was white, his grey eyes blazed, his thin lips clenched together, his hand was pressed hard upon the hilt of his small sword; all his sympathies were out with the gallant bird battling so gamely against odds, and battling dumbly. There was another rally; the red bird struck feebly, and fell, when it landed turning half on one shoulder, the other wing trailing weakly. The black cock struck swiftly, the thick curved beak landed fairly in the centre of the narrow skull; and the English beauty lay stone dead in the ring. The black stood right over his fallen foe, and for the second time that night lifted his bugle-note of triumph. A wave of noise rushed through the room—a shout of triumph and some ugly oaths.

Then the Laird o' Glengarlock called in triumph to Lord Paget, "First blood to Scotland, my lord; we shall win the rubber!"

Lord George, with a flush where the pallor had been a moment before, answered with a queer metallic

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ring in his quiet voice, "Yes, Scotland has won the first round, but if you'll let the next two bouts be fought with the steels on, I'll lay you a thousand to fifty in guineas that England wins, and give you the first round in."

"Na, na, ma lud," was the Scot's reply, "ilka mon fits his ain parritch to 's ain lug; we'll e'en bide as we be."

The next bird the Scots let loose was the great eighteen-pound black cock, a majestic creature that carried itself with kingly grace. Originally the Scots had decided to keep this bird for the last flutter, but having won the first bout they decided to try and win the next with their champion, and so bring the match to a close. The canny Scots handler had learnt from experience to be careful with his bird, so instead of throwing the big beauty into the centre of the ring, he let the cock gently down just inside the barrier, and kept fondling it with his hands, knowing well that the bird would not challenge whilst being fondled.

Peter Brown saw the new move at a glance, and understood it. He grinned. "Vittles," said he, "that Scotty learnt somthin' last bout, vake hup and ve'll learn him some more."

Vittles handed up the smallest of the birds left—a slender, perfectly fashioned creature, not more than eight and a half pounds weight; and Peter deliberately balanced it upon his wrist in full sight of the ponderous black cock. He did not fondle it in any way—just held it on his wrist, as if his arm had been a perch. The candlelight shining upon its glossy close-lying plumage made it look like living bronze.

"A gunboat to a line o' battleship," called a voice from the crowd; "it's not fair to England, Sir George."

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At that Sir George turned his pale face slowly towards the speaker. "We accepted the odds, and we'll abide them, sir," he answered coldly; "it's the English way."

A cheer broke from the English side of the ring. The bird on Peter's wrist curved its neck and challenged, as if accepting the odds also, and a pleased smile flashed around Sir George's thin lips. "He'll die game, if he has to die," he muttered.

"Back 'im, my lord; back 'im—'e'll vin."

The words reached the noble's ears, and the voice was the voice of Vittles, breaking loose in an excited, gasping whisper.

Sir George shouted a wager across to the Scottish side, which was promptly accepted, and not a moment too soon, for as the challenge of the red cock shrilled out, the big black bird rushed swiftly across the ring, and Peter Brown tossed the red beauty far and free. The bird landed lightly and gracefully, springing like a piece of tempered steel as it touched the floor. The black cock rushed on, and the red bird rose and clipped both spurs hard against the black head, and passed on behind its foe. Both birds wheeled and faced, and instantly the red was in the air. The black rose too, but so swift was the red that the black cock seemed like a wet ball bouncing; and once more the red's spurs struck home; and this time the black cock staggered, fell, rose again, staggered and struck blindly but gamely; and, as it struck with its great black curved beak, the black-red half wheeled, and rose again, and clipped with such speed and power that the black cock dropped as if shot—dropped without a quiver or a struggle, and lay still.

"Wictory, my lud, wictory!" yelled Peter Brown.

Lord George smiled his cold smile, but the glint in his eye proved his pleasure. Reaching out his

hand he dropped a couple of guineas almost into the mouth of Vittles, who, on his hands and knees, with face upraised to the ceiling, was shouting in an ecstasy of delight, "Wictory, an' Hingland wins; wictory, my lud, wictory!"

On the Scotch side there was silence, for the defeat had come so suddenly and so swiftly, and had followed so rapidly on the heels of what had looked like certain success that the Scotsmen were dumb-founded. Then, looking at the graceful conqueror standing by its dead foe, a very model of triumph, some of the more generous sportsmen in the Scottish ranks added their voices to the English din, and gave the gallant bird a rousing cheer; but, in the confusion, some ruffian at the back of the room threw a dirk with such true aim that it took the graceful cock right across the neck, and stretched the champion by his fallen rival.

There was a moment of unbroken calm.

Not a sound, not a word; then fierce voices thrilled out on all sides; angry English curses mingled with bitter Scotch oaths.

The night-rider, who had been pointed out to Vittles by Peter Brown as a famous highwayman, dashed his tall slender body through the first rank of Scotsmen, and made a blow at a square-built fellow standing on a seat behind him. "You lousy villain, is that how you pay a wager?" he cried. The fellow staggered under the blow, and before he could recover himself he received another and another from the same quarter. The highwayman was an Englishman, and the slaying of the cock in that cowardly manner had roused all his sporting instincts. He had had a heavy bet with the fellow who had thrown the dirk, but it was the unsportsmanlike act, not the wager, that had roused him.

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In a moment all was uproar; the fellows of the baser sort pushed violently to the front, and those who had betted but little in the result made the greatest outcry of all.

The Laird of Glengarlock forced his way to where Lord George Paget stood. "Ye'll nae be blamin' me or ma freens for yon dastard trick, ma lord." He spoke fiercely, his bonnet was awry, his cheeks flushed with passion, his hand on his sword hilt.

"Not I, Laird," was the hearty response; "it was the work of some gutter-scum; but, come, we'd better get in and stop this turmoil, or there will be good blood spilt. Call off your friends, laird, and I'll soon get mine in hand. As for the rest, they may cut each other's throats with pleasure, and the world will be none the poorer thereby.

By this time a free fight was in progress. Vittles, with all his love of combat aroused, was hitting, and hitting swiftly, at every Scotch face he saw; but Peter Brown, silent as any bulldog, was slowly but surely forcing a passage for himself to the spot where the dirk had been thrown from. He had seen the thrower, just as the night-rider had seen him; and now Peter, the old prize-fighter and wrestler, was bent on revenge. He never once opened his mouth to curse, never turned his head when he was struck, never looked to right hand or left hand, but ploughed onward, his fierce old eyes staring and his hard jaws set. He had bred that bird and had reared it from the shell. He had taught it its ring craft, and had admired its speed and pluck. If it had been killed in honest fight he would scarce have given it another thought, for to him a death in the ring was a game-bird's highest destiny; but to see it done to death like that, touched him as much, perhaps more, than

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if the bird had been a man. He had trained men, and handled men—men who had sold a battle and brought discredit upon him; but that bird had never failed him, and never would have failed him—he knew that.

All at once a woman's voice, shrill and unmistakable, cut through the din. "The watch, the watch, and the runners!" cried the voice of the duchess.

But she was too late to effect her purpose; for even as her shrill voice gave the alarm, the watchmen and a strong force of runners, as the police of that day were called, closed in upon the room full of sportsmen.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion," demanded Sir George, in his icy manner.

"No offence, my lord, no offence," said a big burly red-faced man; "you and all the other people of quality are free of us, but there are some birds here we want."

Everything in the room was still, except in the corner where the dirk had been thrown from, which had laid low the English cock. From that spot came low, savage growlings, like the growlings of a mastiff, and the rhythmic thud of falling blows, and low groans of pain, and fierce cursings in the Scots tongue; for Peter Brown, the old-time prize-fighter, had found his man, and little he cared for the watch or all the runners in London. At every blow of his sledge-hammer fist, the Scot would gasp and groan and grunt—"Haud off, ye deevil—loan me a dirk, an' a'll stick it atween his twa ribs. Oh! ah! by St. Jamie, ye'll brak ma lug! Let ma oot, let ma oot, and show ma the way to Scotlan'."

But nothing was heard in reply but the brute-like growls, and the thud thud of Peter Brown's brawny fist.

CHAPTER XIII

A MIDNIGHT CONFERENCE

OLD Sir Charles Fiveash was fast asleep in his huge old-fashioned bed at midnight. He had gone to bed rather earlier than usual, because he had been somewhat vexed and not a little puzzled by his bonny daughter Jane. He had had an hour alone with her, which was not a very frequent occurrence, and thinking to combine the duties of a parent and a diplomat he had attempted to sound her in regard to her feelings for Prince Otto of Svir; but he had found her wondrous cunning of fence, and, do what he could, he could not draw any admission from her beyond this—that she liked a good many of the young gallants whom she met, but best of all she liked to remain her own mistress.

“That is all very well,” he had answered; “but you must wed some one, my dear, sooner or later; and Jane, I am getting old, old and tired, and I should like to know who is going to take care of my little girl when I am gone.”

She had looked at him with a touch of wonder in her eyes when he spoke like that, because it was not his way to be sentimental; she thought he must be feeling ill and worn, and his grey face touched her. She slipped to his side, and wound her arms about his neck, and kissed his

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cheek, and fussed with him as she had done when she was a little child. "Don't bother about the men, dear," she answered him, "they are not worth worrying about. I don't want to marry any one of them; I shall stay and keep house for you as long as you live; and then, when you have gone away from me, if I see a man good enough to take your place, I shall marry him and settle down into a plain housewife, but not yet, dear. I love you, and I love my liberty. I am very happy as Jane Fiveash, and shall be in no hurry to listen to those who come a-wooing."

He drew the fresh young face close down to his own, and stroked her cheek with his smooth palm. "You are sweet and kind, my Jane, to say so, but even if love does not call you away from me, there is something else that people in our rank have to consider."

"Is there," she cried jestingly; "then, we will not consider it."

"I know you better than you know yourself, Jane and I know that you will go where duty calls you, and do what duty demands. But don't tremble, child; thank God, in this call love and duty may go hand in hand, if my eyes have not deceived me."

She did not answer him in words, but pressed her cheek closer to his worn face and held it there, for he was very dear to her; she was proud of him, proud of his great talents, proud of the trust and love his sovereign bore him, proud of the calm, serene figure that never wavered when all others below the throne were upheaved by the magical events of those strenuous times.

"I have been keenly disappointed in your brother Charles," her father continued. "I had hoped much from him; his career seemed to promise great things, but I have found that the bed-rock is rotten. He

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has no idea that duty to one's country stands higher than all things else, except, of course, duty to one's God."

"He is so young," she pleaded, and with a twinkle in her eyes, which he did not fail to see, "the young men fancy that all the wisdom of the gods belongs to them. I have heard you say yourself that a man does not really know good wine from the best of wines until he is thirty, and very seldom then, though a fool can tell good wine from bad wine at twenty."

He smiled and sighed all in the one moment. "Charles has all the stupid obstinacy of the young, and calls it convictions, or conscience, or some other twaddle; and for some stupid reason of his own, some mere caprice, or passing passion, he sets himself against a match that, for deep and peculiar State reasons, I have made up my mind should be brought about; that match may mean much to England, Jane."

"I know, dear," she said softly; "Charles has told me about it."

"Oh, has he; has he told you, or hinted to you, that the prince is not worthy?"

"I should not agree with him if he did, dear; but do not be harsh with Charles—he loves her, or thinks he does."

"Of course he loves her," said her father, pinching her ear playfully; "but that is no reason why the prince should not love her also, is it; and I tell you, Jane, Charles must swallow his ill-liking or ill-humour and put up with the taste of it. You do not dislike Prince Otto of Svir, do you?"

"I think he can be very charming when he likes; but I fancy he will be less charming as a husband than as a suitor."

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"Most of us are, Jane, most of us are," chuckled the old man; "we are sad dogs, we men, at the best; but I am glad that you have no prejudice against the prince—that takes a load off my mind. I wish you would try and convert your brother to your way of thinking, for I miss him, young as he is—or perhaps, because he is young; and I, well, I am not quite what I was."

She kissed him and left him then, and neither knew that they were at cross-purposes; for the old noble thought his son had told his daughter that he desired her to marry Prince Otto of Svir, and his daughter thought that he had been talking of a match between the woman Charles loved and the prince.

"She will marry the prince, if he asks her, and I express a wish that she should do so," muttered the old man, "and yet—and yet I don't think her heart is set altogether on the match. Well, well, I'll to bed, and let fate weave the web."

As for his daughter, as she unrobed that night, she was thinking a good deal of her brother and Constance Stanleigh. "She's a vain woman, and an ambitious woman, and I don't think she's a very good woman, and I can't see why Charles worships her as he does. I wish I could convince him that it would make his father a happy man if he would not put himself in the way. Charles ought to give way and let Constance marry the prince; I'm sure he'd make her regret slighting an English gentleman before she'd been married a month." Then the sweet little gentlewoman went to bed and dreamt of a sailor facing the storm of the sea, and the guns of the foe, for England's sake; and she smiled and wept by turns in her dreams; for sometimes, as maidens will, she dreamed of love and soft caresses, and at other

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moments she dreamed of storms and battles. But, whether of storms or of kisses, the central figure of her dreams was always Cousin George.

At midnight Sir Charles was disturbed from his slumber by his man, who informed him that Mr. Thornton wished to see him upon business that would brook no delay. In a moment the old lord was out of his bed and into his dressing-gown, and two minutes later he was in the library. "Don't trouble to apologise, Thornton," he said briskly, "I know you too well to think you have dragged me out of bed for nothing; you have news of importance, news that would not keep until to-morrow morning."

He was all animation, all fire and energy; no one, to have seen him then, would have dreamed that he was the tired-looking old man of a few hours before.

Mr. Thornton bowed gravely. "You are right, Sir Charles, I should not have come to you to-night if the matter in hand would have brooked delay; it is serious, sir."

"Are we outwitted again, Thornton?"

"Not yet, sir, and I do not think we will be, but there is no time to waste; my brother has arrived from St. Petersburg."

"Then your information is beyond question, Thornton, for your house has never yet failed us."

"It never will fail you, sir."

"What is his news?"

"Bonaparte has prevailed upon the Czar to close England out of the world's commerce. From St. Petersburg to the Straits of Gibraltar the British are to be banned."

"Then the Muscovite is going to act openly at last?"

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"Not yet, sir; and if Bonaparte's intentions can be frustrated, we may even yet force the Russian bear to keep still."

"You have something else to tell me, Thornton?"

"Yes, sir; Bonaparte is going to seize the Danish fleet, now lying at anchor in their own waters, and use that fleet against us. It is not very powerful, but it may mean much in the hands of the French."

"Bonaparte must never get that fleet, be it great or small, Thornton."

"I think as you do, sir."

"Do you know the strength of the Danish fleet?"

"Yes, sir; the fleet now at anchor in the Baltic is only two sixty-fours, fifteen frigates and sloops of war, six brigs, and twenty-six gunboats."

"Add those to the French navy and they become formidable."

"Dangerously so, sir."

"Yet we are on friendly terms with Denmark."

"Denmark will not, cannot long, remain neutral, Sir Charles. If Russia presses her on one side and France on the other, she will surely throw in her lot with them."

"Can we buy the Danish fleet, Thornton?"

"No, sir, for that will take time, and time means just the delay that Bonaparte wants."

"You mean that we shall have to take the fleet, make a pretext and sweep the Baltic?"

"I do."

"That means war with Denmark."

"Seize the Danish fleet, sir, and pay for it afterwards; better go to war with Denmark now, and have her fleet, or sink it, than wait for her to make common cause against us, and have that fleet harrying our commerce."

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"Bonaparte has us on the hip, Thornton; if we don't move he will have the fleet; if we do move, we make a fresh foe."

"The bold course is the better course, sir."

"It will drive Russia to oppose us openly."

"It may or it may not, Sir Charles; for my part I think it will go far towards cowing the Russians; and as they are playing a double game with us, sir, why not use this very knowledge to sow distrust between them and the French: it would be a master stroke of diplomacy."

"All measures are unobjectionable in diplomacy, Thornton; I wish I could do as you suggest."

"Seize the Danish fleet, sir; and let the news reach France that Russia has betrayed Bonaparte's plans to us. He is suspicious by nature and revengeful by instinct; he will never forgive the Muscovite for his apparent treachery."

"How did you happen to know the exact strength of the Danish fleet, Thornton; you seem to know everything worth knowing."

"Simply because I cultivate men worth knowing, sir. I obtained that information from your own nephew, Captain George Fiveash of His Majesty's navy, a man of bold and original ideas."

"Your brother brought this other information from St. Petersburg himself, I think you said?"

"I did, sir; and I will answer with my life for its correctness."

"I wonder the Russians cannot see that it is to their interest to keep friendly with us; if we were out of the way the French would have the whole Continent at their mercy within ten years."

"The Muscovite distrusts England, Sir Charles; there lies the secret in a nutshell."

"Well, then, we must remove that distrust, if

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possible, Thornton; for I see, as plainly as you do, that if Bonaparte can get his own way in Europe he will kill our manufacturers, by closing all the markets of the world to our goods."

"What do you propose to do, sir?"

"I shall see His Majesty the King, as early as possible to-morrow, and try and prevail upon him to give his royal commands to all near the throne to commence a series of fêtes in honour of any Russian notables now in our midst; every Russian of any consequence must be treated as though the whole heart of England yearned towards him. The common people will follow suit, for an English mob always takes its note from the aristocracy, and they will honour whom we honour. Every despatch that goes to St. Petersburg must be in our favour."

"I am afraid, Sir Charles, from what my agents tell me, that Prince Otto of Svir inclines towards the French cause, and therefore his despatches are little likely to be in our favour."

"We must win him over for the time being, Thornton—time is everything; his next despatch will go in answer to this that arrives to-morrow. You must see that it never reaches Russia; his next may be more to our liking; it is our own fault if it is not so. You have agents all over the city, men of every kind and class; do not spare the cost, Thornton; see that the mob makes a demonstration in favour of Prince Otto in the immediate future. As for myself I shall do what I may. And now, my friend, good-night or rather good-morning; you have added one more debt to the many England owes you: some day England will repay it all."

Mr. Thornton went out into the night; and Sir Charles, seasoned to all sorts of shocks, went back to bed, and in ten minutes was sound asleep, for he

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was a perfect master of himself. But he was about earlier than his usual hour; and long before noon some half-dozen of the greatest men in England were closeted together, discussing the news which had been brought by a member of the firm of Gotschalk; and the fiat went forth that the Danish fleet should be seized, even if it involved England in a war with a confederacy of the Northern Powers. Silently and swiftly orders were sent abroad to arsenals and army headquarters; for the council of the nation had decided to send an army as well as a fleet to attack Copenhagen, and capture or sink every Danish ship in the Baltic; and in the meantime everything was done that could be done to woo the Russians in London. Nobles vied with one another in the brilliance and magnificence of the entertainments arranged for the Muscovite; the mob, led by clacquers, followed them with shouts of approbation wherever they went; women smiled upon them; royalty unbent from its high dignity to do them honour; and all the time the hammers clanged in the dockyards, and the great war-ships of England were got in readiness for the grim game of war.

Admiral Gambier, cool and discreet, prepared his ocean war-dogs for the fray; and yet, none knew why or wherefore, except some half-dozen men who went about London with genteel ease and careless smiles, masking the terrible secret that lay near their hearts.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NIGHT-RIDER

WHEN we last saw the cockpit of the Feathered Arrow the English and Scottish gentry had drawn apart from the rabble, the watch and the runners were in possession of every place of exit. The loose fellows and the men of doubtful character were grouped together, and in one corner Peter Brown was pounding the life out of the Scots ruffian who had foully slain his bird.

"Come, that will do," said the burly officer of the watch, grabbing Peter Brown by the collar of his shirt,—“come off the man.” But Peter paid no heed to him; he merely growled more deeply and drove his great fist harder and faster into the ribs of the half-insensible man he was pounding. It took three or four strong men and the not too gentle application of boots to make him relinquish his hold, and, when he did so, he glared around him with a snarl, ready to renew the combat against all odds.

The officer of the watch knew him. “Come, Brown,” he cried roughly, “a truce to this; your not our game.” But, with a sudden leap on to the form of the night-rider who had been standing calmly by taking snuff, “you are my lad.” So fierce was his rush that the highwayman was almost borne off his

feet, yet, sudden as the assault was, he never lost his head or his nerve.

"Ah," he retorted, "why can't you do things like a gentleman; if you had called for me upon the road I should have been ready for you, but here in this trap I have no chance; but pray give me the treatment that is my due." Three or four runners had hold of him by this time, and he was the coolest of them all. "Pray keep your dirty paws off my shirt front," he said to one; "let me hang, if I must, but don't soil my linen."

"Oh," grinned one of the runners, "don't worry, my lad; we've a nice clean piece of hemp for your neck."

"If your hemp is no cleaner than your hands, I shall be sorry to make its acquaintance," he laughed boldly; "but, now that you have me, tell me how did you know I was to be here to-night?"

The officer did not reply, but looked significantly at Mr. Saxon, who was standing a pace or two away.

"Oh, I see; sold by that mean-souled cur," was the swift answer. "Well, well, it's all in the luck of the road. I always knew him for a coward; I did not think he would sell a pal who had saved his neck, though." Then, turning his head with a laugh, he cried, "My Lord George, you were always a sportsman and a man of honour. Will you do a man in his last extremity a favour?"

Lord George shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't help you," he said; "you should have died on the road, since you elected to live on the road—not come here to be taken like a rat in a trap."

"I was sold by this poor-spirited thing, my lord; but the favour is, that you who are a true sportsman will take my grey horse, Grey Gauntlet, and keep him for your own use. He is the best horse in

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England, and I don't want him to fall into this creature's hands. No craven has ever yet thrown a leg across him, and I never want a coward to cross his back: that is why I should like you to have him, my lord."

At that, Saxon was for making a move towards the door; but one of the runners, at a significant look from the officer in charge, stopped him and gruffly bade him wait where he was until he had permission to move.

"You need have no scruples about taking the horse, my lord," said the highwayman; "I had a purse from you, at the point of the pistol, not six months ago, so take Grey Gauntlet and let us cry quits."

"Where is the horse?" asked my Lord George.

"He is in the stable of the Friar's Cowl Hostel; you will know him by his one blemish, for he has a coal-black stocking on the near hind-leg. You will have the score to pay, which a couple of guineas will easily cover, and you will own a horse that has few equals in this world."

"Very well," was his lordship's curt comment. "I'll take the horse, and treat him well; if you never come out of jail again, you won't need a horse; and if you do, why, I suppose you will lift the horse from me at the first opportunity. Can I do anything for you whilst you are waiting your trial?"

"Thank you kindly, my lord; if you will tell your man to bring me a couple of clean shirts, I shall feel obliged; I should not like to swing in soiled linen."

"You shall have the shirts, I pledge you my word on that. Pity you had not been as particular about your character as you are about your linen, you would not now be bound for the gallows."

"It's too late for sermons, my lord; I loved the rattle of the 'bones in the box' too well to remain an honest man, and I am not going to whimper at this time o' day. Good-bye, my lord; good-bye, gentlemen; I had hoped to have had some sport with some of you on the road to-night, but the merry night-riding is over. Don't forget Grey Gauntlet, my lord, and the black stocking on the near hind-leg." And, with a nod and a smile, the fellow passed out, and Vittles, looking round him, caught sight of the duchess. Her face was white as death, her eyes were straining madly after the prisoner, her hands were clutched to her bosom as though to stay the frantic beating of her heart. When the night-rider passed out of the room, she sank down in a heap and sobbed wildly. All eyes were turned upon her, for none had ever seen the gay queen of the gutter shed tears before.

"Is that woman the mistress of the robber who has just gone out?" asked Prince Otto of Lord George.

"It looks as if she was," said the other.

The prince laughed his cynical laugh. "It's a guinea to a gooseberry that she helped to trap him."

"That may be the Russian way," was the curt answer, "but it's not the English style. That poor wench would go to the gallows to save him, if she could—I'll bet my head on that."

At that moment the duchess started to her feet, and, catching sight of Saxon, she commenced to abuse him roundly, calling him every name that could fit her tongue. "I'll bring you to the halter for this night's work," she cried; "see if I don't. You have betrayed the best man that ever flitted the roads by night, and as sure as death I'll do by you as you have done by him."

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Saxon threw her a curse and went out, and no one attempted to stop him, for one of Lord Paget's servants had long since gone with his master's orders to get the horse Grey Gauntlet from the stable of the Friar's Cowl Hostel.

Suddenly, the duchess seemed to make up her mind to do something desperate, for, advancing to where Lord George was still standing with his friends, she dropped upon her knees, and, raising her comely face to his, began to plead with him to do something to save the night-rider from the gallows. "He is so brave, so handsome, and so generous, sir," she pleaded; "he is too good for a dog's death."

Prince Otto, looking down at her from his great height, laughed aloud. The laugh nettled Lord Paget. Stooping down, he gave the duchess his hand. "Get up, lass," he said, "no Englishwoman should kneel to any man alive. I can't help your lover; he has gambled against fate, playing his neck against a merry life, and he has lost, as they all lose in the long-run. 'Tis a pity, too, for he was too fine a fellow for such an ending; he would have made a good soldier."

With a drooping head the duchess moved away, and Vittles, ever watchful, ever on the alert, walked close beside her. When they reached the street he spoke to her, but at first she did not seem to hear him; then, mistaking him for one of those who at times importuned her for her favours, on account of her good looks, she turned on him like some she-dog robbed of its young, and snarled and snapped at him in fierce fashion. But he had too much knowledge of a certain sort of human nature to mind her onslaught. When she had spent the fury of her temper, he commenced again asking her if she wanted revenge on the traitor Saxon. She seemed to com-

prehend him at last. "Yes," she said; "but *you*, what can you do to help me?"

"Vell," replied Vittles, "ven I want to tie up a dog I uses a bit of string."

"Well," she said sharply, "what then?" For she knew the London way of expressing a thought.

"Vell, Hi am your bit of string, duchess."

"I don't see how I can use you, Vittles."

"There is a gennelman who stays at our 'ouse."

"Mr. Thornton?" she queried quickly.

"Hexactly, duchess."

"He is something more than he pretends to be, Vittles."

"'Ow do you know, duchess?"

"Because I have taken messages for Saxon which concerns him."

"Hexactly, duchess; now don't you see 'ow you can use your bit of string?"

"Go and tell Mr. Thornton that Saxon is a spy."

"'E knows that much. You can tell him a good deal that 'e may want to know about the people Saxon sent you to, duchess. You are not the sort to visit an 'ouse twenty times without knowing the door knob from the 'earthrug."

"Who is Mr. Thornton, Vittles?"

"Dunno' for certain," said Vittles; "but he may be the King o' Prussia in disguise."

"That means, you won't tell me. But tell me this, can he help my night-rider? If he will save him, I will serve him body and soul for the rest of my life."

"Hi won't say he can, an' Hi won't say 'e can't; but if you'll do as I want you to do, duchess, you'll give your lover a chance for 'is neck, and get your revenge on Saxon at the same time."

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“What shall I do?”

“Go 'ome, and stay home; don't move out all day to-morrow. I'll see my gennelman, and tell him what I know. If you can be useful to 'im, 'e may come and see you, and you must drive your own bargain. If not, Hi will come an' tell you, duchess. Don't try an' fool my gennelman; 'e knows more about Lunnon than you an' me and fifty like us can tell 'im, an' 'e can stand on his 'ead an' tell whether you are lyin' to 'im. Tell 'im plain an' plump that the night-rider is your lover; tell 'im plain an' plump you want to save 'im; an' then tell 'im all you know. Plain an' plump is the game with my gennelman, duchess. Good-night, duchess, an' don't you go dreamin' of no 'empen cravats for the man you love, for he may live to wear a silk one. Only plain an' plump, mind, an' no finnick tricks.”

To Vittles' astonishment, the duchess threw her arms—those round, shapely arms, that gay young bucks had so often praised—around his neck, and then she kissed him on the mouth—not once, but a dozen times. Poor delighted Vittles, who had never in his life been kissed like that by a woman, stood still in an ecstasy of delight, all the blood in his body rushing to his head.

When, from sheer want of breath, the duchess stopped, he exclaimed, “Go on, duchess, go on; don't mind me; Hi hain't going to call for the vatch.”

She drew away from him, boxed his ears soundly, and darted off into the shadows of the great city. When Vittles arrived home, almost the first thing he saw was the face of Saxon, peering at him over the banisters.

Now it so happened that, owing partly to his new clothes and partly to the fact that he had been down upon all-fours most of the time amongst the

feet of a crowd of men, Vittles had escaped the eye of Mr. Saxon at the cockpit. "You seem to keep nice hours, my good fellow," was that worthy's greeting, as Vittles let himself in with a certain amount of stealth.

"Vy, yes," was Vittles' unabashed reply. "You see, Hi've been takin' the hair; Hi like to take a walk down by the fish-barrers an' take the hair; it is as good as a sea breeze, an' a lot cheaper. 'Ave you 'eard the noos, sir?"

"I've heard nothing to-night," was the lofty reply; "what news is afoot?"

"The great night-rider 'as been takin, 'im an' 'is 'orse, sir, the famous Grey Gauntlet."

"Where were they taken, Vittles?" asked the genteel Mr. Saxon. Whereupon Vittles launched out into a fantastic story concerning the capture of the great night-rider by the runners in some remote spot, and so convinced Mr. Saxon that he at least knew nothing of the evening's doings. At the conclusion of his story, Vittles asked innocently, "Vaiting hup for your gennelman, Mr. Saxon? Precious late 'ours 'e keeps for a gennelman who is down on sporting an' a 'appy life; I'd wery much like to know w'ot 'is little game is."

"Get to bed, an' d—— your impudence," retorted Mr. Saxon, speaking as if he were speaking to a dog.

"Yes, sir, an' very pleased Hi am to go," was the unusually meek reply. And Vittles slunk off and soon courted slumber; but the last memory that haunted his waking moments, and the first to invade the regions of his dreams, was the memory of the clinging lips of the duchess. It did not matter what time he went to bed, Vittles by force of habit was always the first afoot, and the next morning was no exception to the rule. He rose and dressed

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himself, and then made sure, by listening, that Mr. Saxon was fast asleep; after that he knocked gently at Mr. Thornton's door. His touch on the panel was light; but in a moment the door opened, and the shrewd clever face he admired so much was looking into his own. Without a word Mr. Thornton reached out his hand and drew Vittles into the room.

"You have something to tell me, my man; speak low, keep strictly to the point, and be quick; what is it?"

Vittles did as he was bidden, and in graphic language told the whole of the proceedings of the previous night.

"So she kissed you, did she, Vittles?"

Vittles drew in his lips as if he were drinking nectar, and nodded.

"Would you like her to do it again?"

Vittles drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and winked—a long, slow, far-reaching wink. "Vould Hi," was all he said.

"Well, meet me at her room at seven this evening."

"But you dunno where her room is, sir."

"Don't I." Mr. Thornton dropped his left eyelid, and pursed up his lips in such exact imitation of Vittles himself, that the messenger nearly had a fit. "Don't I, Vittles; vell, wait for me on the doorstep and see."

When Vittles found himself out in the passage he looked back at Mr. Thornton's door, and muttered, "Vell, I'm dashed; that quiet gent hain't as quiet as 'e looks; fancy 'im knowin' the way to the duchess's room."

During the day Mr. Thornton was very busy; men came and went every few minutes. He had got rid of Saxon as soon as he arose by sending

him upon an errand that he knew would occupy his time for the best part of the day; and he made use of Vittles as body-servant, much to that energetic person's delight.

The men who called upon Mr. Thornton came presumably to sell pictures or precious stones, or rare lace, or some other commodity; and, as soon as they had interviewed him privately, they disappeared into the highways and byways of the great seething city.

They were his agents, and their mission was to rouse on all sides a popular demonstration in favour of Russian potentates. So well did they do their work that Prince Otto, riding through the city on a great black charger, was astonished to find himself the centre of a mob that cheered him as though he were a conquering hero returning home. He did not understand it at all, but at last put it down to popular admiration for his personal appearance; and he might well have been excused for taking such a view, for his grand figure, set off by his uniform, just suited the great black charger he bestrode, so that he made a magnificent spectacle. But the plaudits of the mob did not prevent him from writing a despatch to his imperial master, advising a closer alliance with Bonaparte, even at the cost of a war with England.

He was in love with the Lady Jane Fiveash, as far as a nature like his could love any woman; but, at any time, military renown was far more to him than the possession of the sweetest soul that woman ever owned; besides that, he was not a little charged by the attitude of Charles Fiveash towards him. The young diplomat had of late been cold and haughty, scarce condescending to give him more than the formal civilities due between men in their

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respective positions; and Prince Otto had taken it as a sign that, however favourable the daughter of the house might be to his suit, the male members of the family were opposed to an alliance. So it came to pass that vanity, injured in its most vital point, had not a little to do with the temper of the despatch he wrote for the eye of the Czar.

Towards evening Mr. Thornton gave Vittles leave to do as he thought fit, and to go where his fancy dictated; and Vittles, with the memory of the kisses the duchess had given him still strong in his brain, proceeded at once to make the most of his personal appearance. And to that end he invaded the sanctuary of the absent Mr. Saxon, and borrowed, without permission, that gentleman's razor and shaving material—a thing he would never dream of doing, had not his blood been quickened by the soft clinging touch of a woman's lips; for this nomad of the great city had a strange touch of romance in his blood, which had never hitherto found a vent. Having used the razor he thought he might go a step further, so he borrowed one of Mr. Saxon's best cravats and a pair of his buckskin gloves and a cane, soothing his soul with the reflection that, after what he had heard concerning Mr. Saxon's previous mode of life, he had probably as much right to the things as Saxon himself, which was not at all improbable. Having surveyed himself in a mirror he was so far pleased with the general results of his piracy, that he determined to complete his toilet, and opening the wardrobe he took out a sealskin hat of fashionable make, which, having tilted gracefully a little on one side, he considered set him fairly upon his feet as a man of fashion. Arrayed in these borrowed plumes he sallied forth and wended his way to the room where the

duchess sat in silent misery. He was delighted with himself, and full of vain dreams, for he considered that if the night-rider was hanged, as he very probably would be, the duchess would stand in need of someone to console her grief. If, on the other hand, the knight of the road should obtain his liberty, which was problematical, he would have to fly from London and give the city a wide berth for many a day; and, in that case, the duchess would sadly need someone to console her. And who could do it better than he, Vittles, seeing that he knew all the circumstances so well. As for Mr. Saxon, he did not feel very much in awe of that gentleman, for he fancied that his course was very nearly run. The duchess received him with every mark of pleasure, but she did not repeat the ceremony that had so enraptured Vittles on the previous night, and no hint of his would induce her to do so.

Punctually at seven o'clock Mr. Thornton presented himself at the door and was admitted, though, when Vittles first saw him, he could scarce believe his eyes; for the sedate gentleman was dressed in the tarnished garb of a court bully, or hanger-on of some dissolute noble—hat fiercely cocked, sword pushed out beyond his cloak, high-heeled shoes not a little the worse for wear, cloak tossed over the left shoulder so as to give the sword-arm free play, coat and small-clothes stained with old wine-stains, ruffles of shirt soiled and awry, gloves frayed and so badly worn that the skin of the hands showed between the gaps.

He looked a ruffler—a fellow ready to take up any man's quarrel, just or unjust, as long as the patron had money to pay him for the use of his sword.

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"Vell, Hi'm jiggered," was all Vittles could say, when he saw who the gentleman was in the swash-buckler's disguise.

"I daresay you are, my friend," was Mr. Thornton's calm retort; "though, as a matter of verity, I have not yet been able to understand what being 'jiggered' is exactly." Then, with an easy smile to the woman, he remarked, "We've met before, I think, dear duchess, have we not?"

"Oh, it's you, is it," was the woman's contemptuous retort. "I thought (she turned her scornful eyes upon poor Vittles)—I thought you said your gentleman *was* a gentleman."

"Vell," cried Vittles despairingly; "vell, so 'e his, duchess."

"And this is the man you said could help me?"

"Hit's 'im, and it haint 'im."

"Pouff!" she cried contemptuously; "I can pick up a dozen as good as he in the Haymarket any night by twiddling my thumbs."

"Suppose we talk the matter over, duchess," said Mr. Thornton, at the same time laying aside his tarnished hat, cloak, and sword, and speaking in the cold magnetic tones of a man who is used to command and to be obeyed.

It was the woman's turn to look astonished. Mr. Thornton drew a rickety chair to the table, and sat down. Vittles at once stepped adroitly behind him, ready to obey his slightest gesture.

"We are not always what we seem, my dear duchess," continued the smooth, even voice. "I am told, that for reasons into which I will not probe, that you desire to save the neck of a rather worthless person, now in Newgate for robbing on the highways; is that so?"

"Yes, sir," came the faltering reply.

"Rather a sad waste of affection and of effort, I consider, my dear; but we won't discuss that. The question is, what are you prepared to do in return for this man's life?"

The duchess drummed the table with her fingers, a red flush mounting to her cheeks. "I'll serve you body and soul," she said simply—"I can't do any more."

"Ah, a woman always says that when she has a purpose to serve," he retorted; he was driving his bargain hard. "However, I will prove you—now give me all your attention."

"Yes, sir."

"You have taken many messages for a serving-man of mine?"

"For Mr. Saxon? yes, sir."

"Did you always take them to the one man?"

"No, sir."

"To how many?"

"To two, sir."

"Who were they?"

"Monsieur Lombard and the Prince of Svir."

"Ah," chuckled Mr. Thornton, "so Saxon is false even to his employer, is he."

"Now, who and what is Monsieur Lombard; you are sharp enough to have found that out, or I misjudge you?"

"He is a Frenchman, who is supposed to be a royalist refugee."

"What is he really?"

"He is a French spy, in the pay of the French government."

"How do you know that?"

"His valet has made love to me, sir."

"Ah! and French valets have tongues, have they not?"

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"This one has, sir."

"Did Saxon send you direct to the Prince of Svir?"

"No, sir; he sent me to the Fig Tree Coffee-House, to give my letters to a serving-man who would give them later to a lady."

Mr. Thornton laughed, a queer laugh full of relish. "Who was the lady?"

"The Honourable Constance Stanleigh."

"I thought so; but how do you know?"

It was the turn of the duchess to chuckle now. "I followed the man, sir; and when I found the lady, I followed her."

"Just so, and the lady led you in the end to Otto, Prince of Svir?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you tell me the names of any other Englishmen who are in communication with either the French spy or the Russian prince?"

The duchess hesitated. "Come," he said coldly, "I have no time to waste; your night-rider's life is on your lips; will any of these fribbles save him?"

"Will you?"

"If you answer me truly, I will."

"Can you?"

"I can."

At this stage Vittles nodded his head violently in support of Mr. Thornton's assertion, and the duchess, urged on by her passion, gave him a long list of names.

CHAPTER XV

THE DUKE'S FÊTE

THE Duke of Baysland had received a hint from his sovereign, that it would be considered a graceful act upon his part if he would arrange a fête in honour of Prince Otto of Svir; and the duke, taking the royal wish as a command, at once set about his task. He was not a lover of display, as a general thing; but, when he did undertake anything of the kind, he did it in a style of such magnificence that few could compete with. In the first place, he had command of an almost unlimited supply of ready money; but that alone would not have made his entertainments what they were. He was a born organiser, and knew just what to do, and what to leave undone. He knew how to gather around him people who were of interest to each other, and how to surround everything with colour, with light and shade, until the whole blended brilliantly. Everyone longed for an invitation to Baysland Place, but everyone did not get it, and yet almost every man and woman of note in London was present on the night set aside for Prince Otto's honour. He was a man not easily impressed. From boyhood he had been used to the glitter of gorgeous courts; but, this night, even he could not help feeling that the capital of England was at his feet to do him homage. Men great in arms were there—some of them fresh

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from the wars; mighty sailors, men whose names were even then imprinted upon the nation's heart, in letters so deep that ages would roll away before they would be forgotten. Statesmen and courtiers, great thinkers and world-renowned orators, and even royal personages swelled the train; whilst the very gems of Britain's womanhood—the wits, the beauties, the great heiresses—made up a show that well might turn a steadier head than that of Otto, Prince of Svir. When he had left his dwelling that night, to visit Baysland Place, a clamorous mob had gathered round him, cheering and vociferating his praises; and the mob had swelled in volume as he proceeded, until, by the time his cortège had reached its destination, a mighty sea of faces filled all available space, and from nearly every throat cheers went rolling upwards. Prince Otto had turned on the threshold of the mansion, and had gazed at that vast sea of humanity, and he had been visibly impressed, and for a moment wished that that despatch so hostile to England, which he had sent to his royal master, was safe back in his own hands. He little thought, as he stood there, that a member of the hated house of Gotschalk, a despised Jew, had organised that demonstration with matchless skill and unremitting labour. He did not know that the Jew's hands had scattered largess amongst the crowd, that the Jews had paid orators to warm each street-corner crowd's heart with affection for the Russian. Had he known that, the smile would not have been upon his face as he crossed the ducal threshold; but it was so. And Sir Charles Fiveash, standing well away from the entrance in the shadow, with his hand on Mr. Thornton's arm, said, "It is a masterpiece in its way, Thornton. What a genius you are, man! You have conjured up legions of people to bawl themselves hoarse in this man's honour, and not one of

them all could tell you why. How have you done it?"

"Oh, it is easy enough, Sir Charles. If you were to mingle with the mob, you would hear a hundred different rumours. One fellow would tell you that Prince Otto has offered to find ten thousand men, and lead them himself against Bonaparte; another would swear that he knew, beyond question, that the prince was coming to command a fleet of Russian ships that are going to help the English drive the French out of the seas; whilst a third would tell you, just as surely, that the Russian prince is to marry someone very near the throne of England, and in consequence the two nations were allied to break the power of France for ever. Bonaparte is a bogey to stir English wrath, and my agents have not failed to make good use of his name. Bonaparte will hear all this before he is many hours older, and he is too wise not to know that we are trying to seduce the Muscovite from him. He will prepare a counterblast, and use it with all rapidity."

"The despatch that Prince Otto will send to his master will ease Bonaparte's mind, Thornton."

A quiet chuckle broke from Mr. Thornton's lips. "If that despatch gets to Russia, sir; but, believe me, it will never leave England."

"You have taken measures, then?"

"I have taken measures, sir."

"Ah, that is well! Now, let us go and do our duty. If things are as well carried out inside, as they are out, I shall be more than satisfied."

If Sir Charles was not satisfied, everyone else was, for the fête was voted on all sides to be the grandest thing of its kind seen in England for a decade.

The music, the flowers, the dancing, the supper, the

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card-playing—all were of the best. Lovely women hovered round the prince to show him that the cold islanders could unbend, and be deliciously free when occasion warranted it. Two women were very near him during a greater part of the night—one whom he sought, the other sought him. Constance Stanleigh was in a fever of unrest; she drew all eyes upon herself by the manner in which she almost forced herself upon the prince.

And young Charles Fiveash was half-crazed with jealousy and rage as he noticed how cavalierly the Russian treated her, though he had to admit to himself that she laid herself open to be slighted. He did not know the bond that bound the woman he loved to the prince. Had he done so, he would have cast her from his thoughts for ever, for he was no weakling. It was not love that made Constance so reckless of her fair name; in very truth, she had learned to hate the Muscovite with all her soul.

Starting out upon the treacherous seas of diplomacy, she had first of all tried to entrap the Muscovite into an admission of his feelings towards Great Britain; but she had failed. Then she had commenced to intrigue with him, in the hope of capturing his secret, but she was a plaything in hands like his. Her uncle had laughed at her when she failed, and had refused to hear her when she tried to plead for his intervention; and in the bitterness of her wounded pride she had fallen back upon Prince Otto. He did not use her to find out what the English were doing in regard to Russia, but he did use her to watch England's intercourse with foreign powers; and she, poor dupe, tried to flatter herself that she was playing the great game of diplomacy with infinite tact. She had mentioned Mr. Thornton to Prince Otto as a man who seemed to have great

influence in high circles, and he had induced her to try and obtain that astute person's secrets; and this she had tried to do, using his man Saxon as her tool. This night she hung about him, trying to force from him some outward evidence of the influence she thought she possessed; and all the time the people she was trying to impress fancied that she was merely hunting for a husband.

It was very different with the Lady Jane. She had met the prince's advances frankly, but did not seek them. She danced with him, and talked to him, and made one of his party for a short time at the card-table—never seeking him, never avoiding him; and her father, who so seldom mixed with the butterfly crowd, except upon very great occasions, engaged the prince in conversation, and later on played whist with him; and all that he did was done in his own inimitable style—such a gracious blending of dignity with pleasantry, that the prince would have been a dullard indeed if he had not felt that no matter what the Lady Jane's brother might feel, her father was not averse to a blending of the two houses in marriage.

He had learned since his arrival in England that there was no family beneath the throne that would not willingly welcome a Fiveash into its family circle; and as he danced with the gay, joyous, bright-faced English maid, it came into his mind that it might be well for him to ask her hand in marriage. He was generally a cold, calculating man; but when once the torrent of his desires set in any particular direction, he was rash and headlong. So it came to pass that, finding himself alone with Sir Charles, and the conversation having turned upon alliances—both national and matrimonial—he made a formal request for the hand of the old lord's daughter.

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It was the one gift from the gods that the old noble most desired at that juncture, and yet his heart grew heavy as he thought of that dainty flower falling into the hands of the giant beside him, for he was not blind to the man's bad qualities; though, for that matter, he held that few men living were really clean enough to mate with a pure woman without loss to the woman.

"I hope, Sir Charles, that the alliance is not distasteful to you?" asked the prince.

"Far from it, far from it," was the old man's hearty reply; "and I can only hope that the alliance of our families may be the means of knitting our countries closer together."

"Nothing that I can do to further such a cause shall be left undone, Sir Charles."

"Your Highness can do much, I am assured of that. And now all I can say is, God speed you; deal kindly with my little girl, and you will find her an able partner in your high career."

So the prince went about his wooing, and Sir Charles, who considered that the previous conversation he had had with his daughter proved that she was perfectly agreeable to the match, and, noting her at that moment leaning upon the Russian's arm, and laughing merrily up into his face, thought that he was fully justified in whispering the good news into the ear of his royal guest, the Prince of Wales.

"Ah, then," answered the heir to the throne, "there is no further need for my presence here; as usual, you have won the game without any great help from anyone, Sir Charles. But before I go I must see the Lady Jane." And catching her eye at that identical moment fixed upon the royal group, he sent a messenger to her, bidding her come to his presence, as he intended to take his departure almost at once.

She was not at all surprised to receive the summons, for she was no small favourite with the Prince of Wales. Perhaps few then present had ever seen a sweeter vision of womanhood than Jane Fiveash seemed, as she bent low before the man who was to rule her country.

"It was to bid you farewell, sweet Jane," the prince said, that I sent for you. "And now let me whisper, before all the world knows of your happiness, how pleased I am to hear of the happy event of this night."

The young girl looked at him with wonder and amazement in her big, soft blue eyes.

"Ah! you chit," he retorted, in answer to her look of wonder. "I believe you will carry that innocent face to the grave; but my dear lady, believe me, the news I shall take away with me is the best that could have reached my ears, and my royal master and father will, I am sure, be as overjoyed as I am."

She looked from the Prince of Wales to her father, and something in his glance, in his eyes, told her all, and the blood flew from her face as if she had received a blow. But the pride of her breeding stood to her then; she curtsied low before him, and withdrew, and he mistook her silence for maiden shyness.

As he moved towards the entrance, receiving the homage of all present, the Prince of Wales encountered Prince Otto of Svir, and took occasion to congratulate him there and then.

"We have many fair flowers in England, Prince Otto, but it seems that none but the sweetest would suit you. Well, well; our gallants must go to Russia, and mend the matter by carrying off the gems of Russian womanhood."

Those words gave the cue to the brilliant throng,

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and, scarce waiting for the departure of Prince George and his suite, they flocked around the Lady Jane, and gave her congratulations. Nor was Prince Otto of Svir forgotten in the general rejoicings.

The news fell as a thunderclap upon the ears of two men, for both Charles Fiveash and Mr. Thornton were staggered by it. Charles made his way at once to his sister, and found her sparkling with wit and merriment in the midst of a joyous throng. With some little difficulty he managed to withdraw her to a quiet spot, and at once began to upbraid her with her secrecy and slyness.

"Here have I been breaking my heart," he cried, "because I thought that the Prince of Svir intended to marry Constance Stanleigh; and all the time it is you the prince meant to wed."

"So it would appear, Charles, if I am to believe my ears; but as yet I have heard nothing of it except from the lips of gossips."

"The prince has not spoken to you, Jane, to ask for your hand?"

"Not to me, Charles, though I presume he has to my father."

"But you, Jane, surely your wishes have been consulted?"

"In a diplomatic matter a daughter is merely a useful chattel, Charles. Run away, like a good boy, and be thankful it is not your Constance who is to be laid upon the altar of sacrifice."

"My Constance," he retorted bitterly; "the Prince of Svir has her heart as a plaything."

His sister drew up her tiny figure, and flashed him an indignant glance. "Be good enough to remember, Charles, that whatever the lady may be to you, you are coupling her name with that of my future husband."

So her brother left her, feeling not a little ashamed and uncomfortable, for he knew in his heart that he was glad that it was his sister, and not Constance Stanleigh, who was to marry the Russian; and something within him told him that his sister was by far the greater sacrifice.

For ten minutes the Lady Jane remained alone, her proud young head bowed in her hands, and all her heart yearning for the sound of a sailor's voice and the clasp of a sailor's hand. More than once all that was womanly in her nature revolted against the fate that had fallen to her lot. More than once she felt tempted to go to her father, and demand that this thing should not be; but then she thought of him, of his loveless life, of his great unending service to his country, of his pride in his diplomacy, of the shame that would come to him if she failed him; and, like the noble woman she was, she determined to stand steadfast. Charles would have failed him, she thought, but I will not. The pride of race was strong in her. She was a true daughter of a great old breed, a breed that had helped to make the little island mighty; and in the hour of her trial she would not fail the old man her father. But, all the same, her heart ached for the sailor, because she knew he would think she had abandoned him for a princely husband. She raised her face, her eyes shining hot and bright, ready to face her world without quailing, and saw Mr. Thornton standing near her. He came to her swiftly, courteously, gravely.

"I have been looking for you," he said, in his low, grave voice. "Sir Charles asked me to find you; he has a communication of importance to make."

"Oh!" she said, "you have known me since I was a baby; tell me, Mr. Thornton,—for my father says you are the wisest man in England,—tell me what to do!"

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“Obey,” he said gently; “a daughter should obey; it is her duty to her father.”

“If I refused now, if I said I would not marry this man, that my heart was elsewhere, what would the result be, Mr. Thornton?”

He paused to give his words due weight. “If you were to do as you suggest you would break your father’s heart, you would lower his pride into the dust, you would drive Prince Otto from London to St. Petersburg full of black hate for everything English, and you would breed a war—a war that at present England cannot stand.”

“It makes me doubt if God’s eye is on us, as I have so often heard you declare. Is a woman’s life nothing, is a maiden’s vow nothing, is God asleep?”

“Be strong, be brave—all is not written yet; and, in the darkest hour, remember, ‘The Watcher on the tower never slumbers.’”

CHAPTER XVI

GREY GAUNTLET

IN Newgate prison the gay night-rider was cooling his heels and resigning himself to his fate, for he thought, and with good reason, that his day for scouring the country as a bird of prey was over. He had lorded it over the roads for three years past, and the runners had sought him far and near. He cursed Saxon as a knave, as he paced his cell; for that rascal had proved himself a traitor amongst traitors, and had sold a man who had at one time saved him at considerable peril to himself. Like many another desperado the night-rider tried to make light of his fate, and always managed to show his jailers a smiling face. Yet in his heart he dreaded the awful moment when the rope should put an end to a misspent life. He had plenty to eat and drink, and gay clothing to wear, for he had money on his person when he was made prisoner; but he never undid his cravat, or did it up again, without thinking of that other necktie that was awaiting him—the rough, rude, hempen tie, which would be his when he topped Tyburn Hill, to die like a dog in the presence of a grinning, drunken, blaspheming crowd of men and women. He would hum a snatch of a song or whistle gaily enough when in the presence of his rough guards, for he had enough physical courage to

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make him pretend to be careless, even though his whole soul sickened at the thought of the dreary death that fronted him. He knew well enough that he deserved his fate, knew, too, that he had no one to thank for being the miserable outcast he was but himself and his own vices. He had always promised himself that he would die in the open, and never be taken upon the fatal cart to die a dog's death; but at last he found himself waiting for the disgraceful ride, a knave trapped in his knavery.

Bitter indeed were his thoughts, bitter as worm-wood; all the gloss and glitter of the life of the roads was off it now. All the shame, the humiliation, the bitter contempt of it remained, as remain it always does for the fool who tries dishonest courses. Sometimes he thought of his boon companions, of their rides and their toasts; sometimes he thought of women he had known; but most of all he thought of Grey Gauntlet, the horse he had ridden so often and trained so well. It was the best trait in his character, his love for his horse. "I ought to have known," he muttered, "I ought to have known that hound Saxon was a traitor; Lord, how Grey Gauntlet used to lay back his ears and snap and kick if the dog laid a hand upon him. If he'd only known how to speak, I'll warrant he'd have warned me to keep clear of the lying traitor; warn me—lord! he did warn me a score o' times, but I was too blind to see it then. I can see it plain enough now, as I can see many another thing." Only once had he heard from the outside world, and that was when Lord Paget had sent his man with three ruffled shirts—one to be tried in, one to cry in, and one to die in, as the man had said with a brutal grin.

"The first and the last will suit my case splendidly," the night-rider had answered, "but the second

would only fit a lacquey. But I know your master sent no such message; tell him from me that I am grateful, and now tell me how is my horse? Has your master ridden him yet? Tell him to be watchful of him for a little time, until the horse gets used to him, for he has been under my hand so long that he may not take kindly to a stranger at first."

"My lord has got rid of the grey devil, and right glad am I for it," retorted the lacquey; "for twice, before we had him twenty hours, he put his teeth into me."

An angry oath broke from the night-rider's lips. "Got rid of the horse I gave him, got rid of Grey Gauntlet, the best horse in England! more fool he then, for he'll never throw leg over such another."

"Lord send I may never see such another; why, man, he bit and kicked like a hide full of evil, and not one of my lord's grooms dared ride him, or for that matter go near him. So, my lord got rid of the brute to a Mr. Thornton, a gentleman of fashion, who mixes much with people of quality."

The night-rider picked the shirts from the pallet where he had laid them. Tossing them contemptuously into the man's face, he cried, "Take them back to your master, and tell him from me that I'd liefer go out of the world in my bare skin than I'd be beholden to him for a favour."

The fellow picked up the garments and took himself off, not ill pleased, for he meant to keep the shirts for himself; but the turnkey had a word to say about that, for, snatching the parcel from the serving-man, he cried, "Oh no, you don't, my gay cockerell! those things are my perquisites; anything that the prisoner has had is mine, my lad; it's a rule of Newgate."

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"But," stormed the lacquey, "I brought them in."

"Ay, lad, but you won't take them out. It's one thing to get into Newgate," he grinned, "and it's another to get out, as many a better man than you knows."

Swearing he would tell his master, and bring trouble upon the turnkey's head, the discomfited serving-fellow took himself off, to tell a garbled story to the man who had sent him upon an errand of kindness.

But the turnkey was to have a fall before he lived very much longer; for, when Mr. Thornton, plainly dressed as a simple merchant, called at the prison with an order to be allowed to see the night-rider, the governor of the jail had handed him over to the same officer; and the turnkey, mistaking his man, had commenced to blackmail him after his kind, and, being met with a peremptory refusal, resorted to a system of bullying, and eventually refused to quit the cell where the prisoner was confined unless he received at least a guinea.

This he did, because he rightly guessed that the visitor wanted some private conversation with the night-rider.

"My order is to see the prisoner alone," objected Mr. Thornton.

"Oh, is it? and my mind is made up to stay and bear you company—unless," he added meaningly, "I retire to drink a bottle of wine to your honour's health. It's not often we get merchants of substance this side o' the walls o' Newgate."

Then the visitor, dropping his conciliatory attitude, turned upon him, and speaking in the cold, deliberate tones of a man who was not wont to bandy words with an inferior, ordered him from the cell like a

dog. "Get out," he said; "and if I see so much as the shadow of that evil face of yours near the door, I will make it my duty to see that Newgate is rid of you for ever before this day is out."

There was something in the tone of the supposed merchant's voice and in his bearing, as he uttered the words, that sent the fellow from the cell, in fear and trembling for his situation. He went off, not daring even to mutter a protest; for he had seen some strange visitors arrive in humble guise at that dreary abode of crime during his tenure of office, and he was inclined to think that this one would be quite capable of fulfilling his threat. Had the visitor swaggered and cursed him, as some of the gay young bloods would have done, he would not have been so badly frightened; but the simple dignity of the supposed merchant, who neither raged nor swore, put a great terror into him, for he well knew that his conduct in regard to prisoners would not bear looking into; for of all the thieves in that nest of thieves, none were worse and few were as bad as the turnkey himself. He had bought his office for the sake of the plunder that such a man as he knew how to wring out of the criminals who found their way into his hands, and it was seldom that he was baulked in his detestable transactions. As soon as the fellow had taken himself off, Mr. Thornton went and stood by the bed where the prisoner sat.

"I am sorry that I cannot offer you better accommodation, even though you are a stranger to me, sir," said the prisoner rather flippantly.

"Your accommodation is no better and no worse than your conduct and your crimes merit," was the stern retort.

"If you only came for the purpose of telling me

that, my dear sir, you have made a visit for nothing, for I was well aware of the fact."

"I suppose you know also that you are standing within the shadow of the gallows?"

"I should be dull indeed if I did not know it; but, though I know it, I am not so sure that the subject is such a pleasant one that I care to discuss it."

"No," was the austere rejoinder, "a death on the gallows cannot be a pleasant subject of discourse for one of the family of Valance."

With a savage oath the night-rider sprang from his seat, his face white as the face of a dead man, his eyes blazing, his hands clenched, his nostrils dilating.

"Who are you, sir; who are you, in God's name, that you know my proper name? I thought that was buried long ago."

"Nothing dies, not even our sins, young man. As to who I am, or what I am, let that pass, for I shall not enlighten you upon either subject; but to show you I did not draw my bow at a venture, let me tell you that your real name is Richard Valance, youngest son of an honourable and upright man, Sir John Valance, in the county of Wessex."

All the flippancy was out of the night-rider by this time, all his jauntiness had departed; he was cowed. His one great secret, which he had considered buried in his own heart, was his no longer. He had fondly hoped that all men who knew anything of his identity considered him dead and buried. He knew that his father and mother and his brothers thought so, and now the hideous thought was borne in upon him, that they who had mourned for him, as for a man who had died gallantly in the field, would know him for a knave, a cheat, a gallows-bird. He had fought as a mercenary in the army of the King of Prussia, and

his commander had reported him dead after one of the engagements ; and, acting upon that report, he had concealed from his friends and relatives the fact that he was still alive. When he returned to England, he had resumed the dissolute life that had originally compelled him to cross the Channel, and the fortunes of the tables going against him he had drifted into the criminal career of a night-rider, caring little what his fate might be, and knowing well that his career must be a short one. His only dread was that any one who knew his family should ever recognise him, and so bring his shame home to the family he had wronged by his wild course of life. He knew how his father would take the news, if it ever reached him. He knew the upright old Tory would tie himself up in a knot of pride, and refuse ever again to mingle with his friends and neighbours. He knew that his mother would sink shame-stricken to her grave ; he knew that his brothers would curse his name ever after the grave had closed over him ; for them a death on the gallows meant an everlasting blot upon a name that had never before been smirched. He was far gone in iniquity, this gay ruffler, but not so far gone that he could not feel the anguish that his death would cause to others. It was the last fragment of his better nature, his one remaining virtue.

Mr. Thornton looked at the man with stern, un pitying eyes. "I know your career from boyhood," he said, "careless in youth, headstrong, intractable. You have been a law unto yourself, and now you know what your folly has brought—not upon yourself alone, but upon others whose lives are blameless."

The man on the bed sat and shivered, a great fear in his eyes—not physical fear, but the fear which comes from the soul.

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“Will you purchase your life, and not your life alone, but your secret?”

The question fell from the hard, set lips of Mr. Thornton in crisp, stern accents. The man on the bed slid down on to his knees and clasped his hands about his questioner's feet.

“My life or not, as you like,” he whispered in low, gasping accents, “my life or not, as seems good to you, sir; but my secret, I'll ride straight into hell to save that.”

“Listen, then. To-night you will be freed; your horse, Grey Gauntlet, will be awaiting you outside these walls; pistols will be in your holsters; and here is a purse to supply your needs. A man on horse-back will be holding your horse. Ask no questions, follow him blindly, and when he tells you what to do, go and do it. As you obey instructions, so will you be treated; break your orders, and in less than a week all England shall know who and what you are.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE SON OF THE DUST

ALL around the Seven Dials poverty, in its most squalid form, was rampant; there the scum of England mixed with the dregs of many nations. A little colony of Italians of the worst possible kind had taken up their residence there. The women, for the most part, were rough and unchaste; the men were the bravoës of the great unholy city—they could, for the most part, be hired out to do anything that was ruffianly for a small wage. They were poor, ignorant, and superstitious; they had idols of wood and cheap clay, holy beads and sacred pictures—all of which had been blessed by their priests, a set of charlatans almost as ignorant as the poverty-stricken ruffians on whom they imposed. A lay brother sold these gaudy appendages to religion in a dirty shop, that looked as if it had never been blessed by means of a thorough scouring since it had been erected.

It was not a safe neighbourhood for a stranger to go into; the women were always on the look-out for the unwary who might possess money or jewellery; and if once they tempted a person to enter one of the alleys or one of the houses, he seldom came forth with more clothing to cover him than might suffice for a child. As for his jewels or his money, the less he haggled about things of that sort the

better for him, for they were quick to use a knife in the Italian quarter. The Jews lived not far from the Italians, and their poverty was often as great as that of their neighbours; but a traveller could pass through the Jewish Ghetto.

The scum of the Ghetto would trick or cheat in trade, they would even at times pass bad coin to a stranger; but robbery with violence was scarcely ever known to occur, even in the worst of Jewish circles; and when upon rare occasions it did occur, the whole Ghetto would combine to make restitution. They were not so grateful to England as they should have been, the great bulk of those people. They had come from all parts of the world—from Russia, from France, from Germany, from Spain, some even from far-off Asia. They had heard that England was a free country, and, knowing nothing of real freedom, they had imagined that each man would be allowed to do his own will, go his own way, enact his own laws, to do what seemed good in his own sight. When they found that there were laws in England, which had to be obeyed by both Jew and Gentile, they were disappointed, not at first realising that without law there is no freedom, without restraint there is no security. But the superb Jewish customs soon brought the more reasonable of the Jews into line with the laws of the land, and there was always a widespread feeling of disgust in the Ghetto when robbery or violence occurred.

On the night which particularly concerns us, there was a deep-seated feeling of unrest in the Ghetto of Seven Dials, for a man had been found stripped almost to his skin, wounded as well, and sorely hurt. There was no doubt in the Ghetto that he had met with foul play, and at the hands of a Jew too, for no Gentile could have done the deed secretly and then

have conveyed the man to the spot where he was found without having been seen by some of the Hebrews. As the night set in, dark and squally, a man made his way from one house to another, and from one room to another—a strong, quiet man, meanly dressed. When he knocked at the door he did not give the peculiar double knock which the Jews used to announce a wedding or the birth of a son in Israel, neither did he use the three distinct knocks which acquainted the inmates that a death had taken place amongst the chosen people. The knock was one which men of his profession alone used, for he was one of those Jews who travel the earth from Dan to Beersheba—the real wandering Jews, who have existed ever since the days of Moses, and will exist until the race dies out, if it ever dies. He was known as the “Son of the Dust,” and the “Son of Wisdom.” It was his duty to go where he might find wisdom, knowledge, understanding. Deserts could not stop the Son of the Dust, mountains could not bar his progress, oceans might not stay him nor torrents daunt him. The wonders of the mighty deserts and the mysteries of far-off cities, the Son of the Dust had to learn; and his learning was free to every Jew, no matter how poor or lowly. The law, as laid down by Moses, forbade him to take with him either food, or money, or change of raiment. He had, by law, to go and gather the dust of wisdom wheresoever it might lie, and store it up in his mind and spread it amongst the chosen people. He was to be no respecter of persons, no slighter of the poor, no sycophant to the rich. When he reached a Jewish house, he knocked and entered, and the guest-chamber, or the best the house afforded, was placed at his disposal. A vessel was made ready for him to wash his feet, a change

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of raiment was laid ready to his hand ; and, when he had refreshed himself, the head of the house would cry, " Let us gather the dust," and all the household would gather round the Son of the Dust, the Son of Wisdom, and gather the learning, the light, the knowledge that he dropped. It was a glorious custom, and from it arose that passage in Holy Writ, wherein the Master tells His disciples to go forth, two by two, into the world, to spread the " New Light " among the Gentiles, saying, " Whosoever shall not receive you nor hear you, when you depart thence shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them." This He did, because the custom was unknown amongst the Gentiles, even as it is unknown amongst them to-day ; and the ignorance concerning the law, which made the Son of the Dust what he was, causes the ignorant amongst those who fill our pulpits in these latter days, to say that the Master meant those who shook off the dust from their feet were to do so in wrath, whereas " the dust " they shook off was the dust of knowledge, the knowledge of the " New Light " ; and His disciples being Jews, understood him. So it came to pass, that the Son of the Dust, the Son of Wisdom, who went through the Ghetto in the quarter of the Seven Dials, met with a reverent reception in nearly every home. As he entered each squalid home, the head of the house would cry, " Let us gather the dust," and all, old and young, would flock to his feet to pick up that which he should shake off. He told to each the same story—the folly of robbery, of murder, of outrage, of wrong ; and bade all who overheard him stand ready to protect the common weal by denouncing the evil-doers in their midst ; pointing out, by many human illustrations, how men who lived by violence came to violent

ends, and brought others down in the ruin of their fall.

It was long before he slept that night, for he had many homes to visit; but before he laid his head upon the pillow, in the home of Massach Benjamin, the shoemaker, at the far end of the Ghetto, he had roused the whole Hebrew population to a sense of their responsibilities, and many eyes were abroad in search of the evil-doer.

Now it so happened that a child had been born about that time to the wife of the second son of the house of Gotschalk, and the Feast of Circumcision was at hand. It was to be a great feast, though, according to the Jewish law, no man was to be invited to be present—rich and poor, old and young, were welcome, but none were asked, for that was the law. The news of the feast soon spread, and the rich Jews went to honour the feast by their presence, the poor went to enjoy it. No women were admitted; the men only came, and they came as they liked. There were two rooms set apart for this festival—one for the rich and well-dressed, and one for the poor. This was not done out of any spirit of prejudice, but that all might feel at home and enjoy themselves. And there was this wisdom in it—that the poor man, ravenously hungry, could eat with gusto, and not mind who saw him; for those around him were, like himself, poor and in need of the food, in the eating of which they blessed themselves, and laid up blessings for the babe in whose honour the feast was spread. On the other hand, the rich men, sitting apart, could dally with their food and not seem to be a reproach to anyone more hungry than themselves. At the door of the house sat the father of the babe, ready that he might see any man who might, on account of his poverty, waver on the

threshold; and to the poorest visitors the master gave the heartiest welcome. That was the law, and the custom—and a beautiful custom, which made a bond between those that had plenty and those that lacked daily bread. In the poorer room, each man had his portion set before him, and it was his to do with it what he liked; he could eat it there, or he could carry it away with him, to divide with his family, if it so happened that his wife and children were hungry. This some of them did. First of all, they asked for a blessing upon the house, and upon the young child; and then, breaking off a morsel, the man would eat, to show that he had partaken of the feast; and then he would gather up what was left, and go quietly away.

On this day of the feast in the home of the Gotschalks, there were many who were hungry and had left hungry mouths at home, and they for the most part ate a morsel and went away rejoicing; but many remained, and these talked in angry tones concerning the assault and robbery committed in the Ghetto the previous night.

“This thing will bring evil upon us all,” said Isaac Barnett to Saul Bischoff, who sat next him. “Already it has got abroad in the city, and the Gentile boys stoned me for a murdering Jew, as I went to gather rags from the outhouses.”

“True,” replied Saul; “and a Gentile woman whose shoulder I pushed by accident in the market-place turned on me, and raised a great uproar, crying, ‘Would you rob me and murder me, Jew, as you and yours robbed and murdered the man in your Ghetto yesterday?’”

“The curse of our father Abraham on the man who brought this new thing to vex us,” snapped Isaac.

“Ay, may he have a black year,” growled Saul. “These sons of Gentiles do not love us over well as it is, and now my little Laban is afraid to show his face out of the Ghetto for fear they will pelt him with mud. We shall have to make the matter good to the wounded Gentile, or we shall know no peace, and bread is hard enough to get as it is.”

This sort of talk was very prevalent amongst the poor. In the room where the rich men sat at meat, the same subject engrossed the minds of those who were present.

“It is a bitter piece of work,” said the man who in the Gentile quarters was known as Mr. Thornton.

“One wrong done by a Jew in a Ghetto throws the Hebrew cause back in England a year. We are striving for all the rights of citizenship, for the rights of military and civil service, for the right to have a voice in the framing and administering of the laws under which we live; and those who oppose us are only too glad to circulate any misdeed done by the worst of our race, and brand it as a type of the deeds done by us all.”

“Does any man know who the wounded man is?” asked the Rabbi Deschard.

“We know nothing except that he is an Italian.”

“Can nothing be learnt concerning him in the Italian quarter?”

“No Jew dare go there to make inquiries,” cried a dozen voices; “the Italians hate the Jews at all times, and just now they are over-free with their knives.”

“There is no need for a Jew to run the risk of losing his life or of raising a tumult by going to the Italian quarter. I have sent my servant there, and, though a Gentile, he is shrewd enough to find out

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what may be found out; and his risk will not be great, for he is a child of the London pavement, and those Arabs of London know how to make the Italians keep their hands from the handles of their knives."

It was Mr. Thornton who spoke, but if he could have seen his servant Vittles at that moment he might not have felt quite so confident of his capacity to make the Italians keep the peace.

Vittles had received his instructions to go into the Italian quarters and find out, if possible, who the Italian was who had been robbed in the Ghetto. He had prowled about dressed in his old clothes, making use of one pretext and another, but had failed to learn anything. It was not the first time this son of the pavement had been in that vicinity; and he knew the reputation of the place. But he also had this advantage, that he knew a good many of the men by sight and not a few of the women; and, moreover, he knew that he only had to raise an outcry, in the way peculiar to the London gamins, to call a horde of roughs of his own countrymen to invade the Italian Ghetto; this, as he well knew, was no hard task, for the rowdy element of the Seven Dials looked upon a sally into that insalubrious quarter as a sort of festival not to be missed. He had done all that lay in him to find out who the mysterious Italian was, and had not gathered a shred of evidence of use to him; but he determined not to be vanquished. Being of an original temperament, he hit upon a new method for getting at the secret. Walking into a shop where the holy relics, beads, and paintings were sold, he got into conversation with the lay brother who acted the part of trader. First of all he examined a few pictures, dealing with subjects of a pious kind, but none would

suit him; then he wanted to see a rosary, and kept the lay brother busy for a full half-hour showing his wares, but nothing met with his approval.

"Do you want a charm to keep off danger?" asked the lay brother.

Vittles said he did; and the man produced a charm in the shape of a little cross, but Vittles declined it. The lay brother showed him some images.

"Are all these things holy?" asked Vittles.

"Yes, yes, I have told you a hundred times; all these things are holy—they have all been blessed."

"Where were they made?" asked Vittles.

"In Berlin," replied the lay brother; "the Jews in Berlin make them—that is how we sell them to you so cheap. We get them over, and the Church blesses them."

Vittles gave a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders and rudely threw the idol down on the dirty counter. "Vell," he said insolently, "I von't buy any truck of that sort. Italian gods made in Germany by Jews—Hi know the game; five per cent. off for cash at a month, and the blessing thrown in."

The Italian screamed with rage and, lifting a mop, struck at Vittles with the handle.

"Drop that," growled Vittles, "or I'll serve you as I served your comrade in the Ghetto."

The Italian stood absolutely stupefied for a few seconds; the audacity of the ruffian who had invaded his shop bereft him of speech. "You—it was *you* who robbed and nearly killed Pietro Brigonni!"

With a chuckle of joy Vittles wheeled when he heard the name. Dashing out of the shop, he sped at full speed along the narrow alley, and never once

turned to look if he was pursued. The lay brother had, however, only followed him as far as the door; and there he stood cursing Vittles, thinking that he had merely visited the Italian quarter to make trouble, as many a rough had done before him. But Vittles knew better. He was flushed with victory and delight as he sat awaiting Mr. Thornton's return, and could not conceal his self-satisfaction from the clever eyes that searched his face.

"How much have you learnt?" was all Mr. Thornton said; but the look and the smile that accompanied the words went far with Vittles.

"The name of the Italian who was nearly killed in the Ghetto is Pietro Brigonni."

"Is that all you know?"

"Yes, sir."

"You could not find out who waylaid him, or why?"

"No, sir."

"How did you learn his name?"

Vittles told his story simply.

"You have done well; the rest will be easy, but you cannot help in that matter any further." He drew out his purse and pushed a coin into the nomad's hands. "You know the Hebrew Ghetto, Vittles?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down whilst I write a letter, which you will take to the Ghetto and give into the hands of Saul Aarons, who keeps the fish-shop on the corner of—"

"I know it vell, sir."

"Just so."

He wrote in Hebrew: "The name of the man who was robbed and hurt in the Ghetto was Pietro Brigonni. His name has been upon my list for a

long time. He is a French agent. Seek amongst the French and Italian Jews for a clue to the robbery, and, above all, find out if any papers or documents were taken from the man; if so, bring them to me without fail. You have a way at your disposal for finding this out. If you do not get the particulars I require, every French and Italian Jew now living in the Ghetto will be shipped out of England within a week from to-day. This is my last word."

Vittles, who was one of those wiry men who never seem to tire of walking, soon had the letter deposited in the hands of Saul Aarons, and before he had reached home again his master's orders were being fulfilled. From house to house well-known Jews went hunting out every French and Italian Jew, demanding a full account of how and where the whole family spent that particular evening. Gradually the circle grew narrower and narrower until but one family was left, and there the evidence they sought was found. A French Jew and his family confessed to the crime; they had known the Italian in France, and they had been tools of his in London.

On the night of the robbery the man had called at their home in the Ghetto, and a quarrel had arisen concerning a matter of payment; and the Italian had first been beaten until he became insensible; then his clothes, papers, and purse had been taken from him, and he had been thrown into the alley. The fellow's purse and his clothing were sent on to the lodging where he had been carried; but his papers were taken to Mr. Thornton, and the French Jew and his family were banished from England by the Jews of the Ghetto, who paid his passage back to France. Mr. Thornton only glanced at the papers

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that had fallen into his hands ; then he sent a communication to Sir Charles Fiveash, and that night the wounded Italian slept in Newgate, and the jailer had careful instructions to see that he held converse with no one.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT

THE night had set in stormy and rather dark, and small comfort was to be had in the dreary cells of Newgate. Some of the wretched inmates, who had little to hope and therefore little to fear, were making the night foul with lewd songs and blasphemy; some were drinking and gambling, for many things could be done inside those grim, grey walls if a man only had money to bribe the officers of the jail. Some slept with callous indifference, early as it was; and others sat in silent misery, counting the hours that lay between them and eternity. Much has been written by men who never spent an hour with a condemned man, concerning the reckless bravado, the almost careless glee, with which men condemned to die by the hangman's hand await their fate; but others who have passed through that ordeal, who have watched the wretch doomed to a dog's death, counting the moments that divide him from eternity, know better. Between the scaffold and the cell the steel-nerved man may pass with firm tread; ay, even with jaunty stride, determined to die game. The hardy outlaw may even toss a jest or a jibe to the hangman as he pulls the cap over his eyes, and go into the shadow-land with a defiant laugh upon his lips; but that is the last

scene, the final effort of tortured nerves strung to madness. But see the man alone—waiting, watching, counting, thinking; every moment of his past comes back to him, from childhood to manhood; he sees every sin, every crime, every black spot of a lifetime. Those deeds are his ghosts, they never leave him. He tries to sleep, and even in his fitful slumbers his cell is full of the phantoms of the past. Every neglected opportunity for good comes to him and reproaches him until he writhes in torture: He moans in his sleep; the dews of agony gather upon his brow; he starts, awakes, and shudders, dropping his head in his hands. He tries to pray; but, between him and his prayers, the ghosts of an ill-spent life come and go. He cannot pray; his lips may frame the words—but his heart, his brain, his inner self, remain apart from his prayers. Let those who have never seen the doomed man face to face with his past, with the appalling dread of the future resting upon his soul, keep their flippant pens off such a scene; for this *is* hell. And in that jail of Newgate, upon this night, more than one man waited for the last call.

The gay night-rider, as he paced his cell, heard the wind moaning drearily; he heard the sounds of revelry, for the songs and laughter and blasphemy from the carousing crew was borne in upon him inside the walls, and the muffled noises of the great city beyond; and, for the first time in his life, all the shame of his career dawned upon him. He clenched his hands, and swore that, if ever again he got out into the open air, nothing on earth should tempt him again to play the knave. But would he ever again get out a free man? At times he hoped, at times a fear that brought the sweat to his brows took hold of him; and yet he was no craven. He had proved that in many a reckless

charge, under the Prussian flag, on many a bitter field. He did not know the man who had come to him, and bid him hold himself in readiness for deliverance; his instincts told him that the man was a gentleman. But a thousand things might happen to alter his plans. He might complete his task, whatever that task might be, without the aid of a night-rider hard held in Newgate prison; and, as he thought of the alternative, the bold rider of the high-ways, the desperate ruined gamester, leant his head against the wall of his cell and shivered with sickly dread. Something within him told him that he was to be used as an instrument of State, if he was used at all, else how was his visitor to procure his release? That his mission would be a desperate one, he did not doubt. The more desperate it might prove, the better it would please him; the greater the odds, the better heart he would carry into the enterprise. Odds had not terrors for him. God! would the message never come?"

He stood back, and in his anguish drove his left hand hard and clean from the shoulder at the wall, and left skin and flesh and blood on the cruel grey stones. He did not feel the pain from the shock; all he felt was his utter helplessness, his complete powerlessness to assist himself. At that instant the key grated in the lock; the wardsmen and the governor of the prison entered. The turnkey saw the blood upon the prisoner's left hand, saw that it had stained the lace upon his coat cuff. He flashed the lantern on to the wall and saw where the blow had landed; he grinned, he knew what it meant; he had seen that sort of thing before—often. The barn-door fowl sits down and mopes, thought he; but the hawk dashes itself against the bars. "Come," said the governor curtly, and turned upon his heel.

The prisoner snatched his hat from the chair by the bed, and strode mutely after the governor; down the corridor they walked, the governor foremost, the night-rider next, the turnkey bringing up the rear. Out of the corridor, across the dirty ill-paved courtyard, they marched in Indian file; they did not go to the great gate, but to a smaller one, iron-bound and iron-belted, studded with brass, a private door of which the governor alone held the key. The door swung open, a man in cloak, hat, and riding-boots, stood outside. He peered into the prisoner's face; then handed a document with a big red seal upon it to the governor. The latter bowed as he took it; no single word was spoken; the little iron-bound door swung to again, and the night-rider found himself free, with the wild wind blowing upon his brow, and the rain beating upon his face. He threw back his head, and, expanding his chest, drew great draughts of air into his lungs; the air was tainted with all the odour of a foul city—but it was the air of freedom. He could have yelled aloud with joy; he cast his eyes back upon the grey pile of stone that looked so grim in the night, and vowed to his soul that they might carry his dead body in there later on; but, whilst there was life in him, he would never cross its portals again.

The man who had been waiting for him touched him upon the arm with a riding-whip, and then, going to his horse, mounted it, saying something to the fellow who was holding the horses in a whisper. The night-rider sprang to his horse's head; he could not tell it in the darkness from any other horse. But, as his hand touched the bridle, the brute pushed his soft muzzle against his face and whinnied. He knew the horse then. A sob broke from him—a dry, choking sort of sob. "Grey Gauntlet, Grey

Gauntlet, my prince," he whispered; then, dipping his hand into his pocket, he pulled out four or five golden guineas, and pushed them into the not unwilling hand of the fellow who held the horse; and the next moment he was in the saddle, and the pair of horsemen clattered off. Grey Gauntlet, fresh after his unwonted idleness, and full of delight at the feel of the knees he knew so well against his flanks, made pretence to buck and unseat the wild night-rider, though he knew full well, the gallant beast, that he could no more unseat that man than that he could buck himself out of his own hide.

The fellow who had been holding the horses marched off swiftly to where a little stall stood with its glimmering light, and there he examined his prize. When he saw the golden guineas he chuckled aloud and said, "Vy, this his a vision; Hi'll 'ave to 'ave a little turn-hup with some one to see if Hi'm awake"; and straightway he proceeded to air his wit upon a couple of chairmen who were regaling themselves with hot coffee, with the result that he had the little "turn-up" in very short order, and a merry turn-up it was. Several sounding blows he received in the ribs, during the process, quite convinced him that it was no vision, and that the chairman was awake, if he was not. "Vonder v'ot vill 'appear next," he soliloquised, as he marched off, bruised but happy; "vouldn't vonder hif Hi die Lord Mayor hof London: think Hi'll go and 'ave a vord vith the duchess."

The night-rider followed his guide, asking no questions, seeking no explanations; it was enough for him to know that once more he was free, with his well-beloved horse between his knees. At last London lay behind them, and the long dark road to Leicester town lay in front. A little inn on the

roadside, flanked by cottages, sprang suddenly out of the night. The guide drew up, dismounted, gave his bridle-rein to the night-rider, and in silence entered the inn. He was away perhaps a quarter of an hour; when he returned he had a fellow with him.

"Dismount and come with me," he said curtly. The night-rider sprang to earth and gave the waiting-man his bridle, and followed his guide into a private room in the inn. Once inside, with the door shut, the guide threw back his cloak, tossed his hat on to a chair, unwound a heavy muffler from his neck, and stood revealed as Mr. Thornton.

"We shall sup here," he said, speaking all the time in the harsh peremptory manner he had used to the highwayman; "and when we have supped, we part. I go back to London, you go on to do the task that is set you to do."

The night-rider nodded.

"You have no idea what your task is, I suppose?"

"None."

"Well, I will tell you whilst we wait for supper. I am a King's agent. An hour ago two men, one a big man, clean-shaven, a Russian; the other a tall spare man with a black upper lip, a Frenchman, passed here as if making for Leicester town. The Russian is mounted upon a sorrel horse, the Frenchman upon a black mare; both are well armed with sword and pistols; they carry despatches; one carries the cipher message, the other carries the key to that message. They will go as far as Rugby together, and there they will separate; they are bound for Russia. Why they take this roundabout path is simple and plain; they desire to throw anyone who may follow them from London off their heels. I must have both the cipher message and the key to it. But I must have no outcry, no law, no publicity.

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The work must be the work of a highwayman or a ruffler. If you fall into evil case, you must abide by it. I cannot, and I will not, help you. If you are wounded and fail, you must let me know and at once. Do you accept?"

"With all my heart."

"Then take this sword—it is one of the best; and these pistols—they were your own; and this purse—it was the King's." The last words were spoken in a menacing whisper. "If you fail me, you had better crawl into a ditch and die there."

"I won't fail."

"If you succeed, and you must succeed, bring the papers to me." He leant over and whispered his name, and the name of his lodgings, in the night-rider's ear.

"Shall I be a free man then?"

"What will you do with your freedom; court the gallows again?"

"Not I; if I can get a passage across the Channel, for myself and Grey Gauntlet, I can find a place for myself either in the army of Austria or Prussia."

Mr. Thornton sat and thought, as he always did think, before speaking; then he said, with his rare smile, the first smile he had given the night-rider, "Stick to that resolution; and, if you succeed in your mission of to-night, I will find the passage across the Channel for both you and your horse, ay, and give you work to do on the other side as well."

The supper came in, and the pair ate in silence; and, when it was done, Mr. Thornton rode back to London; and the night-rider, with a long, useful sword lying snugly against his thigh, let Grey Gauntlet's head loose in the direction of far-off Leicester town. He knew every inch of the way,

for many a time he had followed his unlawful calling on that long, dark road. At almost every village and hamlet he was known to one or two men, mostly hangers-on at the inns, fellows who had often received bounties from his purse in the past, in return for the information they supplied. These men stood him in good stead now; for no sooner did they catch sight of him, in the inn parlours or tap-rooms or stables, than they hastened to congratulate him upon his escape, for all knew of his capture.

"Out and away on the roads on the old game, Captain?" said one fellow at a comfortable little hostel.

"Ay," was the reply, "and in search of good game too, friend Thomas. Hast seen two worthy merchants pass this way, one on a sorrel horse and one on a black mare?"

"Ay," replied Thomas, "and scurvy mean they were, drinking by themselves, and eating by themselves, and too mean to remember by so much as a stiver the stable lads who dressed down their nags."

"Ah," laughed the night-rider, "these foreign merchants don't know the rules of the road, and I must teach them." He dropped a coin amongst them, telling them to drink his health, and once more rode on.

He had no difficulty in tracing his men, for at every inn his people gave him the tidings he wanted; and he knew that he was gaining rapidly upon them, for Grey Gauntlet was fresh and eager, and both he and the horse knew every rut in the road, which gave the night-rider no small advantage over the men he pursued, though they were pressing on at their best pace. In that long, dark ride

on the muddy highway many a horse would have come to grief, if ridden as Grey Gauntlet was ridden that night; but the grey always seemed to have a leg to spare for emergencies, and nothing short of an avalanche could have brought him down. Now and again he blundered into a quagmire, but the "spare leg" was always ready for such an emergency, and the grey saved himself cleverly. At last, just at the dawn, he came up with them as they drew rein at the Grey Goose Inn, a good five-and-thirty miles from London.

"A wet night, and a dirty one, gentlemen," he called out cheerily. But they vouchsafed him no reply. They merely gave their nags to a shivering ostler, and intimated that they intended to sleep there, and bade him look to the animals; then they stumped off into the warm inn.

"That's the foreign way of looking after a horse," muttered the night-rider; "well, well, I'll e'en look to my own."

He took Grey Gauntlet by the bridle and led him to the stable, and with his own hands drew off saddle and bridle; then he took a handful of straw, and set to work to rub the beauty down; and then, without ceremony, picked up a warm rug and made the grey comfortable. The ostler during this time had been rubbing down and feeding the sorrel and the black; they were eating ravenously, showing plainly that they were badly in need of the food.

"Sandy," said the night-rider quietly to the ostler, "I want you to do a dirty job."

Sandy tried to look like a cherub, and failed badly.

"Get some stale fat and rub on the black nag's teeth."

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Sandy did it.

"Now the sorrel."

It was soon done; and the pair of tired nags, after taking a mouthful of corn, and tasting the foul grease, stood with their heads drooping over the manger; they would not swallow enough corn to keep life in a hen, with that rotten rubbish clinging to their mouths.

"I'm sorry to treat a good horse like that; but it must be done, Sandy. I don't want either of those fellows too close upon my heels to-morrow."

Sandy said he was sorry to do it also. But his looks belied his words; he would have done the same to a babe for a guinea.

Pushing his cloak back, and giving his hat a defiant twist, the night-rider entered the inn. If anyone there knew him, no one showed it. He asked for a room, a supper, and a bed. "But first let me have a bottle of wine; your best, mind. Haste, for on a night like this a man must drink only that which will warm his blood; so bring the best you have, and do not study the cost."

The room, with a fine fire in it, was ready, and the host did not keep him waiting over long for the wine. "'Tis a fool's game," he grumbled, as he closed the door behind him and set the wine on the table—"a fool's game, to come marching into a place like this, my lad, and you fresh from Newgate. I'll warrant the runners are not far behind; and the life on the roads should have taught a man like you that fellows who spy *for* you will spy *on* you, if the reward is big enough."

The night-rider poured himself out a glass of wine, a generous glass, for he was cold and thirsty, and held it up for a moment to let the firelight make it blush.

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"Needs must, when the devil drives," he said at last. "I couldn't stay out all the time in the rain; I must fill my purse in the old way, and then Grey Gauntlet and I must e'en chance our luck. Who are the two fellows who came in just in front of me; not gentlefolk, by the way they treat their cattle."

"Silk merchants, from foreign parts, making for Leicester town; if their own report is to be believed."

"A nice story, truly; do silk merchants travel on horseback by night?"

"They are no night-hawks, I'll swear that."

"Hawks or herons, what does it matter; they fly by night, and if their feathers are worth having, I'll have them."

"Not under my roof."

"Under no man's roof—I do my work on the road; but why so honest all at once, Dick Farrant?"

"I want none o' Newgate, my lad; few who get in there have thy good fortune; once in, stop in, is the rule."

"True enough, good Dick; and I like Newgate even less than I did before I had lodged there, and will do naught to bring an old friend to such a lodging-house. So now let me have my supper, and I'll pass my word not to bring the runners here."

After supper he strolled carelessly out to see that his horse was doing well, and his heart smote him to see the other two poor hungry beasts sniffing at their food, whilst the continual crunching of his horse's jaws told him that Grey Gauntlet found no fault with the fare.

"Sandy," he whispered to the villain who carried the lanthorn, "my plans are miscarrying, and this

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time I cannot afford to let them go wrong, so you must e'en do a dirtier trick than the last. Have the two nags had water?"

"No, Captain."

"Well, see that they don't drink until just before they start, and then drop this into the sorrel's water; mind you, the black must have none. I shall sleep in my old room. Wake me when the pair of silk merchants start, if I am not afoot before them."

Sandy looked at the little piece of soft dirty brown stuff that the night-rider had slipped into his palm, and chuckled to himself; he well knew what it was for. He saw the night-rider meant to separate the two men if he could do so, and waylay them one by one. He meant to poison the sorrel horse, so that he would scarce travel more than five miles before being attacked by the staggers; but the villain knew in his heart that if the hue-and-cry was close on the heels of the night-rider, and the reward was big enough, he would just as readily poison Grey Gauntlet.

CHAPTER XIX

LOVE'S BURIAL

CHARLES FIVEASH was talking to his sister the day after the Duke of Baysland's fête, talking with the selfish complacency of the young who have been called upon to make no personal sacrifice. He had commenced the conversation by remarking upon the brilliance of the match that her father had arranged for her with Prince Otto, but she showed him a side of her character he was not familiar with.

"Hey day, brother Charles," she cried, her lips acurb with sarcasm, "but it was only the other day that your hand went to your sword-hilt at the very mention of the prince's name! Is it diplomacy that has changed all your fine feelings, or is it because the prince's bride is to be Jane Fiveash, and not Constance Stanleigh?"

He had looked foolish at this direct sally, but soon got over it.

"'Tis a great match, Jane, and will serve great ends, and after all you had not given your heart to anyone else. 'Tis not as if you were in love with any other man, and had to give him up. With a Fiveash near the throne in London, and another Fiveash near the throne in St. Petersburg or Moscow, it will go hard if we cannot

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undo some of the knots that the French are always tying."

"A few hours' sleep seem to have brought you much philosophy, Charles. You seem to take it for granted that I shall accept the prince. As for my not loving any other man, what is your warrant for saying that?"

"You have shown no preference for any other man's society, Jane."

Pretty Jane curled her red lips more ominously than ever.

"Maybe not, Charles; but then it is not, I think, the custom of the women of our family to show their affections for their lovers as openly as some women do. We do not run after the men, Charles—we wait for the men to run after us. It may not be so diverting to the world at large, but it is more dignified, more womanly for us."

Charles flushed scarlet under this cruel thrust, for he knew that she was alluding to Constance Stanleigh's marked attentions to the Prince of Svir. Of a truth, the little Lady Jane was in a bitter humour this day, and did not spare her brother.

Charles shifted to what he thought was surer ground. "Well, Jane, if you do not marry the prince now, he will surely quit London in high dudgeon, and you will humble our father's pride into the dust. He is bent upon this marriage with his whole heart and soul."

The vestal did not answer her brother directly, but folding her hands around one knee, as she leant forward in her chair, she said, as if speaking to the shoes on her feet, "Ah, 'tis sweet, 'tis passing sweet to see a young man so devoted to his aged father, so careless of self, so willing to make every sacrifice to shield an old man's honour and an old man's

pride. 'Tis not every man's portion to be blessed with such a son. 'Tis passing sweet and wondrous noble in one so young."

There was so much mockery and pain in her voice that her brother was stirred between anger and pity. "There is a way out of this maze, Jane; if your heart is set against the marriage, refuse to go on with it."

"And make my father's name a byword in the mouths of fools, Charles, and lower his old grey head in the presence of his enemies, and make myself the talk o' London town. No, no, Charles, that cannot be. I must accept the prince, since my father has gone so far; but," springing from her seat, with the rich colour mantling her cheeks, "never sit and prate to me again of love and duty; for if you had not been wrapped up in your own selfish love for a vain and ambitious woman, this might never have come to me. And now, for the first and last time in my life, let me tell you that I do love a man—a gallant English sailor, who will go on fighting England's foes just as staunchly, just as boldly, when he hears of Jane Fiveash's falseness as he has always done. But I doubt me much if ever again in this world he will put much faith in a woman; for, Charles, the man I love will think me vile, will think me false, will think I sold myself for power and position; and I must let him think so, for I cannot go to him and say, 'I love you, dear, as I have always loved you, but for the honour of our house I am to wed another.'"

What Charles would have said to this, Heaven only knows, for he was bewildered to the very depths of his diplomatic soul; but who should come bustling into the room but Aunt Mary.

"Well, Jane," she said, kissing her niece, "I hope

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this news means happiness for you, my child." Then putting her hand under the pretty chin, and lifting the head up, she looked intently into the eyes that she had always loved to look at, perhaps because they reminded her of the blue eyes of the young soldier lover of her youth. "Does it mean happiness, child?"

The girl looked back at her steadily, bravely, with shining eyes, but the lips that tried to smile were quivering painfully. With a sudden movement the old gentlewoman drew the girl to her and kissed her, winding her old arms round the slim figure with a movement that only a woman, and a loving woman, could understand and appreciate.

At that Charles Fiveash tried to slip away on silent feet, but his aunt caught sight of him, and laughed harshly. "Ah, my young diplomat, so you have let your sister be sacrificed, have you? Well, well, a woman is a chattel to be bartered, it seems, and you, you fool, cannot see the difference between such a woman as your sister Jane and that poor gadabout, Constance Stanleigh. Oh, I should dearly love to whip you, Charles, though you do look so solemn and so wise."

Then the aunt and the niece were left alone, and no one ever knew what took place between them. This only is chronicled—that when Lord Fiveash sent for his daughter, to tell her that Prince Otto of Svir had made a formal proposal for her hand in marriage, it was the grim old aunt who was weeping, and the fair young niece who was kissing and comforting her, and bidding her be of good cheer.

"The bravest Fiveash of them all," was the old woman's mental note, as her niece went away to meet her father; "ay, the bravest Fiveash of them all. But she does not know yet what it means. But I have

spent my life tied to a man I despise, and I know what such a marriage will mean for her. God help you, Jane! God help you, and God forgive my brother!"

The interview between the maiden and her father was one that neither ever forgot. The old noble, in his most stately way, laid the prince's proposal before his daughter, adding, "From what I gleaned from your own lips, Jane, I do not think you are averse to the marriage."

"I would rather remain Jane Fiveash, father," she answered, with white lips.

And he, thinking this a sign of his daughter's love for him and his home, took her hand and kissed her gently. "Do not think that I am over-anxious to be rid of you, my lass, for that I am not. If I had my own way, dear," he continued, "I should urge the prince to wait a year or two; but I will not disguise from you that this marriage may mean great things for England. Yes, Jane," he paused, "it may mean all the difference between peace and war with Russia; for there is an influence at work against us in the Russian capital, and Prince Otto is a power amongst our enemies. If we win him over we win Russia. And you, my child, you can do much for us, and I will not hide from you that our situation is getting desperate. Our allies are either weak or wavering; our foes strong, desperate, determined, and aggressive. The greatest intriguer the world has known is scheming for our downfall. Russia is wavering. Spain is vacillating. Holland is apathetic. Denmark cares little indeed for us. Prussia seeks her own interests, and cares for nothing else. Italy is half French at heart, in spite of all that diplomats say to the contrary. In the far East the glamour of French victories is upon the nations. The Turk fears Bonaparte, and detests

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us. In all the world Austria alone stands firm, and Austria is bleeding from every vein. If we can foil Bonaparte in his Russian diplomacy, we may force him to try conclusions with the Russians on Russian soil, and then we may yet break the power of France. If it were not for such weighty reasons of State, my daughter, I should say to the prince, wait yet another year or two; but a year, a month, a week, may see this restless Corsican attempting something that may change the whole face of Europe."

"Tell the prince that I am honoured by his offer, father."

"You consent, Jane?"

"Why not, father? Shall I not be the Princess of Svir?"

She kissed him upon the forehead, and left him to his work; and that night all London knew that Prince Otto of Svir and the Lady Jane Fiveash were formally betrothed.

In a rather dingy room in a house at Wapping, two Frenchmen were busy discussing the news. They were both supposed to be royalist *émigrés*; men who had fled to England to save their necks from the guillotine of the Paris mob; but, in reality, they were the head and front of the French secret service in England. The French senators had raved against England for giving the royalists sanctuary upon English soil; but Bonaparte, with his vast mind, which could spread itself over continents, or concentrate itself upon matters of the minutest detail, saw in that very act a weapon which he could turn to vital use. He knew that amongst the men who had fled from France there were many who were corrupt, and many others who might easily be corrupted; and it was not long before he was using those men to keep him in touch with all that went on in England. It was

the two chief conspirators, who were met to discuss the news of Jane Fiveash's betrothal. One was tall and fair, the other short and dark. Both were men about five-and-thirty years of age. The dark man was speaking. "What do you make of this news," he asked.

"If it is true," remarked the other, "the Russian has played us false again."

"Is it the prince who has been befooled into a love match, do you think, or is it part of Russian diplomacy?"

"Who can tell," retorted his friend; "has the man been born yet who can follow Russian diplomacy? I have learnt this much in my career—that when you feel most sure of a Muscovite, that is the time to be doubly upon your guard; for the bear is smooth on the outside but rough on the inner side."

"They must know of this in Paris at once."

"*They*," said the other contemptuously. "*He* must know—he must be told at once; he will know how to checkmate this move."

"*He* shall know—and, now, what do you make of the increased activity in the dockyards? The English have something fresh on foot, have you learnt what it is?"

"Nothing, I cannot glean a word of information; but, like you, I am sure the British fleet means mischief."

"Thornton must know it."

"Of course he knows it; but my spy reads every line of his correspondence, and has not come across a single reference to anything of the sort."

"They are too careful to put a matter of that sort in writing."

"My spy swears that he overhears all that takes place at Thornton's lodgings, and nothing, so far,

has been said there about the fleet. That only proves that the matter is of so much importance that it must be discussed first-hand and in council. Well, we can do nothing more than watch carefully, and report what we see and hear. Do you concentrate all your brain upon this movement of the fleet. I'll see to the despatches. Bonaparte will hear of this intended wedding in a few hours' time, for we can get our news across the Channel now with little risk."

At about the same time Jane Fiveash was in her room, with a small miniature of her lover, painted upon ivory—his one great extravagance, poor fellow; for, as a general thing, such expensive knick-knacks were out of his reach. She held it in her hands, and smiled at it; then she hugged it to her bosom, and cried over it, and made all manner of fuss with it, as good maids will when their hearts are breaking for love of a man, though in the end they learn to endure, and the hearts do not often break. After a little while, she took up one by one the sailor's small presents—silken things he had collected in foreign parts, and quaint odds and ends. They were the dearest things in all the world to her. Poor little Lady Jane! she knew she must not keep any of them, now she was plighted to another; so she made a tiny fire in her own fireplace, and one by one laid her treasures upon the flames, damping them first with her tears. The miniature she saved until the last, and it was not until her lips had been pressed to it again and again that she consigned it to the flames. And when nothing was left but the cold ashes, she took them in her pretty white hands to her open window, and let the winds carry them away; for it was a fancy of hers, that the winds would whisper to her sailor lover that all was over

between them, and perhaps some breeze, more kindly than the rest, might teach him not to judge her too harshly. Then, having buried her dead hopes, the pure-hearted daughter of a fine old stock put her head in her arms and sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XX

STAND AND DELIVER

THE morning broke warm and bright; but the two foreign merchants who had seemed in such haste, that they had been willing to travel by night in darkness and wind and rain along a dreary and dangerous road, did not seem in any hurry to start upon their journey. The truth was, that the two spies had wished to leave London far behind them at a time when their departure would not be noticed; but, as we know, all their precautions were in vain, for the man who had them under surveillance was one who never allowed the smallest detail to escape him. Spies had been upon their heels from the moment they entered London until they left it; and even now, though the night-rider knew nothing of it, emissaries of Mr. Thornton's were in the vicinity to see whether the plans failed or succeeded.

It was well on towards noon when the two men mounted their starving animals, though neither of them dreamt that not a bite of food had their poor brutes eaten. The Frenchman was the first to notice the condition of the animals, when they were but a mile upon the road. "*Parbleu!*" said he, "these English horses, of which one hears so much, they are not so good as they are represented to be; my beast

seems jaded to death, and yet they did but five-and-thirty miles last night.

"Mine is all of a tremble," answered the Russian; "the brutes must have caught a chill in that stable after the wetting in the rain. I'll warrant the rogue of a groom did not dry them last night."

Then they fell to abusing English horses, and the English weather, and the English roads, and the wine, and the cooking, and the people, and everything that was English; and kept it up until the sorrel horse suddenly stopped, and began swaying about like a man overloaded with wine; and just as his rider sprang to the ground, the horse fell. The poison had done its cruel work.

The two spies stood in the roadway and ventilated their opinion of the English in language that was full of flavour. They did not suspect foul play; all they thought of was the poorness of everything in that hated land, including the sunshine. Then, having eased their feelings, they discussed their future movements, and decided to walk on together to the next hamlet, and there purchase or hire another horse. So the Russian caught hold of the Frenchman's stirrup, and trudged towards his destination. Nor was his temper improved by the mire through which he had to pass.

Our gay friend the night-rider, who was by nature and habit an early riser and a restless person, had been vastly annoyed by the dilatory movements of the two spies, because it did not fit in with his plans for him to leave before them. When at last he saw them depart, he sauntered out, and stood by the ostler whilst he brushed Grey Gauntlet down; and then, when the grey coat shone like satin, he carefully adjusted the saddle and saw to his girths, for no man in England knew better than he what a faulty

buckle or a broken strap might mean for a man in the saddle. Having seen to his horse, he drew out the sword that Mr. Thornton had given him from its sheath, and weighed it in his hand to feel its balance. Having satisfied himself upon this point, he felt its point and edge, and made a few swift cuts and passes, like a man who knew well the use of such a weapon. He was pleased with his examination, for, as he sent it back with a clash into its scabbard, he said, "'Tis no toy that; but a tool fit for a workman to handle."

Sandy, the knavish ostler, had been eyeing him slyly all the time, and now broke in with a remark that he had not often seen gentlemen of the night make much fuss over their blades, though they usually looked pretty closely to their pistols.

"You will see a lot of things before you reach the gallows, my lad, if you keep your eyes open," was the swift retort. "A pistol fails a man sometimes, but a good bit of steel never does. So a wise man keeps both in good order, and looks well to both for himself." And then, with a half-angry, half-quizzical look at the cunning face of the fellow, he continued, "Why, Sandy, my man, I've known more than one bold ruffler of the road come to grief through trusting an ostler too near his pistols when a big reward was on his pate."

"Better look to yours then," grinned the rascal, unabashed, "for it's pretty certain the runners are not far behind you by this time; and a good price is always put on the head of a night-hawk who has escaped from Newgate."

The night-rider whipped his pistols out of the holsters, and, drawing the charges, reloaded and reprimed them. Then, having fee'd the ostler and one or two other hangers-on, he sauntered out

leisurely enough, with the bridle on his arm, and his cloak thrown clear of his right shoulder. A parting glass of wine, a settlement of his score, and he was in the saddle, and another moment saw him trotting easily along the road his quarry had taken. After a time he came to the spot where the dead horse lay on the roadside, and he looked around half hoping to see the rider waiting for a fresh horse, for so had he planned it; but, seeing nothing of the man, he shaded his eyes from the sun, and looked earnestly in front of him, just managing to make out one man on horseback and the other on foot.

"So, so!" said he to the grey, "that plan has miscarried, and there is nothing for it but a bold front and a strong arm. So, Grey Gauntlet, let us on and finish it."

A pressure of his knees sent the horse on at a steady gallop. As he drew near the pair of wayfarers he noticed that they kept turning in his direction, as if they half suspected him of some evil design. Then, when he got within fifty horse-lengths, he saw the man in the saddle bend down, and hand the one on foot something which looked ominously like a pistol.

"That's one of the benefits of having a guilty conscience," he chuckled, "it keeps a man always on his guard against surprise."

The pair in front moved well to one side of the road, so that the horseman coming behind them might have no excuse for coming near them. The man on foot kept on the far side near the edge, so that he had his comrade in the saddle between him and sudden attack.

As the night-rider came abreast of the pair, he drew Grey Gauntlet up to a walk, and spoke courteously to the travellers.

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“You seem to have happened upon an evil chance, gentlemen,” he cried, “can I be of any assistance to you?”

The Frenchman answered civilly enough, that they could do well enough as they were until they reached the next hamlet, where they hoped to hire a nag of some sort, and send a man back for the saddle and bridle left on the dead horse.

“As you please, gentlemen, if I cannot help you, I cannot, so I’ll e’en push along; but if I could send a chaise back for your friend, I thought it might help you. Seven miles through the mire is not pretty walking, even on a day like this.”

He touched his hat in salutation, and then gave Grey Gauntlet his head, and shot forward.

“Stay, monsieur,” shouted the Frenchman, “a thousand pardons. Seven miles, *parbleu!* I thought it was but a mile or so.”

“Stay, sir,” shouted the Russian, and our night-rider, reining in his horse, wheeled, and came cantering gently back, so carelessly that no man living would have expected what followed.

The Frenchman had dropped his pistol back into his holster; the Russian had thrust his into the inner pocket of his cloak. Suddenly Grey Gauntlet, obedient to the pressure of his rider’s knee, shied almost into the hedge; it was done so naturally that an onlooker would have sworn the horse had shied at its own shadow, or at something else upon the road; but the movement put the night-rider at an angle with the black mare’s body; then he drove his spurs home cruelly, and Grey Gauntlet dashed forward with a terrific bound and, striking the black mare full on the flank with his broad chest, sent horse and man headlong into the mire, whilst the Russian on foot was dashed to the earth. With a savage wrench of

his arms the night-rider swung Grey Gauntlet round, and just managed to drop his own head below the arched neck, as the Russian's pistol snapped. The Frenchman lay still, stunned and white, just as if his neck had been broken by the fall; so the night-rider, springing to the ground, drew his sword and demanded the Russian's purse; but the other was not disposed to submit tamely to such spoliation. Leaping back a pace, he drew his sword and stood on the defensive; and the night-rider, nothing loth, set upon him; and a great combat ensued, in which the Russian had not a very great deal the worse of the affair, for, though his attack was poor, his defence was admirable. It is not certain how the fray would have ended, had not the night-rider, who was facing towards London, observed in the far distance what looked like two or three mounted men coming towards him, and, fearing that they would join in a rescue, he suddenly lowered his point, and drawing a pistol pointed it full at the Russian's head, at the same time demanding that he should throw down his sword.

The Russian retorted by calling him a coward.

"That is as it may be," was the reply, "but I am not here for the pleasure of fighting with you; it is my business to collect my dues as king of the road, so drop your sword or I will shoot you."

The Russian saw that the man in front of him was in desperate earnest, so, dropping his blade in the mud, he drew forth a well-stuffed purse and threw it at the robber's feet.

The night-rider stooped to pick it up; and, as he did so, the Russian rushed upon him, and made an effort to close with him and throw him. But that movement had been anticipated, for the night-rider was no tyro at this work. As the Russian came in

with a rush, he twisted his pistol round in his hand, and brought the heavy butt with tremendous force down upon the man's bare head, stunning him and causing him to fall. He then took a look at the advancing horsemen, and saw that if he remained to search the two men he had disabled he would possibly have more upon his hands than he could manage, yet it was indispensable that he should obtain the papers. As he gazed, he saw that the three travellers had come to a halt and were surveying the scene with evident reluctance to advance. That sight emboldened him, for he argued that if they had been men of any mettle they would at once have advanced to the rescue. Quickly trussing the Russian's arms behind him with his own belt, he climbed rapidly on to his horse's back, and galloped towards the travellers, holding his pistol in his hand as he rode.

This was too much for the fellows ; for, wheeling their horses' heads, they made off at full speed towards the hamlet they had left. Whereupon he discharged both his pistols in the air, and had the satisfaction of seeing one fellow fall out of his saddle into the ditch with sheer fright, his horse galloping madly on ahead with stirrups flying and bridle trailing, an event which made the other two men crouch over the necks of their nags, whilst they plied both whip and spur with considerable vigour. So ludicrous did they look as they made their frantic escape, with wigs awry and saddle-bags flapping, and arms and legs going even faster than the legs of their horses, that the night-rider sat for a full minute laughing fit to split his ribs. Then once more he turned his horse around, and went back to where the two foreigners lay.

He first of all went through the clothes of the Russian with deft fingers, taking from him everything

of value, even the rings on his fingers he drew off and placed in his pockets; then he searched more minutely for hidden papers, and found what he sought sewn in the lining of his coat. He next turned his attention to the Frenchman, who was evidently rather badly hurt, for he did not even groan when the night-rider turned him over in the search for valuables and hidden documents. By the time the skilful robber had done with his victims, he had left them nothing of any value, not even a guinea to purchase a bottle of wine, or to pay for a night's lodging, for such had been his instructions.

Mr. Thornton had said to him, "Do not let the fellows think that they have been captured by a King's man, for that is not my desire; treat them so that they shall imagine that they have met a common highwayman."

Having done his work upon the men, the robber turned his attention to the black mare which, stood with drooping head by the roadside, and one glance showed him that the poor brute had been badly injured across the loins by the fall and the shock.

"'Tis a monstrous pity, for she was a fine beast," he muttered; "but now I must away, for, in a short time, if I mistake not, half the countryside will be disturbed by those brave fellows who rode so swiftly a while ago."

So, having taken a careful survey of the surrounding country, he jumped Grey Gauntlet over a hedge, and cantered across country, caring very little what might be sent after him, for he knew that no horse in the kingdom could outstay or outstrip the animal he rode; and as for himself, he knew that, with so much plunder in his pockets, he could purchase immunity from attack in any of the villages through which he might pass; for at that time the countryside was full

of vagabond soldiers and sailors who had grown tired of the wars; and any of those vagrants would stand by him in a brawl, as long as he could show them golden guineas to tempt them to defy the minions of the law.

Mr. Thornton had ordered him to act after he got possession of the papers, just as he would have done if his object in attacking the two foreigners had merely been for the sake of plunder. "But," he had added, "if you should find yourself trapped, or outnumbered, or outfought, do not risk losing the documents, but surrender at once, and send word to me, and I will then do all that is needful; but surrender only as a last resort, for, above all things, I want no suspicions to rest upon a King's agent."

He sat down to ride, and, for once in his life, Grey Gauntlet found himself extended to the full limit of his splendid powers. Had the night-rider intended merely to get to London by the quickest route, the task would have been an easy one; but such was not his purpose. He had, as far as possible, to mislead any who might follow him, and this he did with a skill born of long practice. Many a time during his lawless life he had so covered his retreat that, whilst the officers of the law were seeking him in one county, he would be frisking merrily in another. Perhaps it was a knowledge of this fact, that had made Mr. Thornton select him for the enterprise. Now scudding like a hare, now doubling like a fox, he rode as he had never in all his adventurous life ridden before, and at dusk he entered the precincts of the great city once again, and put his leg-weary beast up at the Goose and Gravel Hostel, a place he but seldom frequented; and, having seen to his horse and refreshed himself, he started on foot to deliver his treasure to the man who had saved him from the gallows. So far luck

had been with him; but, as he passed quietly on his way, he passed within arm's-length of the manservant Saxon, who was conversing with Gaffer Griggs, one of the best-known runners in the city of London. Griggs did not recognise the night-rider, but Saxon did. Perhaps the fear that filled his heart made him doubly watchful. Pulling Griggs to one side, he whispered his news.

"Pooh, man; you think every fellow in cloak and boots is your highwayman," was the contemptuous retort. "I'll warrant our gay blade is fifty miles out of London by this time."

"I tell you it is he," retorted Saxon angrily; "I'd know his shadow if I saw it on a wall."

"Well, and if it is he, do you think I don't know my own business better than to run him down yet."

"Why not?"

"Because no reward has been posted for his capture yet—to-morrow it may be different."

"To-morrow he may be fifty miles away; I'll raise a hue and cry."

"And get knocked on the head for your pains; be sure he is not without a following."

"Let us, at least, see where he is hiding himself."

"Ay, there is more sense in that; come on, I did not think he was such a fool as to stay here after getting out of Newgate."

"I can tell you why he is staying, if you don't know, Griggs."

"Why?"

"He is looking for his horse, Grey Gauntlet; he will risk the rope to get that horse again."

Griggs uttered a coarse oath. "You are right; Saxon, from my soul, I think you are right."

The pair dodged the night-rider down one street

and up another; when he crossed the road they crossed behind him, until they saw him enter the lodging-house where Mr. Thornton was staying. Then a deadly sickness came upon Saxon, and he staggered against the nearest wall. Griggs cursed him for a weak-kneed craven, and wanted to know what ailed him.

"Do you know who lives there?" gasped the man-servant.

"No," growled Griggs, "but if the evil one himself was in lodgings there, I should not look as you look now. A pretty fellow *you* are to have ever dared to get a living on the cross."

"My master lives there, and I live there."

"Well, what of that?"

"What of it; don't you see he knows who put the runners upon him, and he is looking for me? I know the man."

Griggs whistled. "Mr. Saxon," he said emphatically, "if Hi was you, I'd try a change of hair."

CHAPTER XXI

A DISAPPOINTED WOMAN

THE Honourable Constance Stanleigh was getting into deep waters, her own want of character and want of stability was dragging her down into unknown depths. She had placed power higher than principle, and the power she sought was crushing her. Prince Otto treated her with scant courtesy, for he knew she was hopelessly in his power. The men and women of her set watched with amazement, whilst she openly sought the favour of a man betrothed to another.

At first they smiled, then they nudged one another, then they stared haughtily, and either avoided her or treated her with formal politeness. The women said she must be bewitched, whilst the men, amongst themselves, hinted very plainly that there must have been something more than mere friendship between the lady and the prince, to make her act as she did. Even Charles Fiveash grew cool in his affections towards her, but she was thoroughly reckless by this time, and more determined than ever to obtain power at any price. In the earlier stages of her intimacy with the prince, she had boasted of the knowledge she possessed, and the information she could obtain concerning matters of state; and he used those old boasts to goad her to do things

which otherwise she might never have done. But her vanity would not allow her to let him think that she knew no more than the idle gossip of the coffee-houses and the saloons. But he, cold-blooded and calculating, took but little heed of her protestations, and openly hinted to her that she was becoming wearisome to him.

Fearful of losing her slender hold upon him, she redoubled her efforts to obtain some knowledge of importance, in order that she might dazzle him with it; and the fates placed in her hands information that should have never reached ears, or eyes like hers.

Her uncle, Lord Effingham,—who, with Lord Charles Fiveash and a handful of other great men, were the only men living who knew of England's intention to seize the Danish fleet, and if necessary bombard Copenhagen,—was taken ill of a malady that was just then ravaging London; so severe was the malady that in a few hours the old statesman was raving of all things under heaven. It was then that Constance proved how far her ambitions had debased her better nature, for, hearing that the old man was delirious, she volunteered to take her place beside him, to nurse him. The physician had at first combated this desire; but when she drew him aside, and pointed out how unwise it would be to have a stranger near a man who, all his life, had been associated with the secrets of the nation, he gave way.

It was whilst she watched by the statesman's bed that she obtained, from his raving lips, sufficient knowledge to enable her to have an idea, not far from the truth, in regard to the intentions of Great Britain in the Baltic. The fever passed almost as quickly as it came, but the violence of the malady left the aged statesman prostrate for a week, and

during that latter time his niece did not overburden him with her attentions, but left him to the care of hirelings. She knew that she had obtained information that should have been sacred, but she did not know what relation her secret had to Russia's intriguers. Had she known she might even then have hesitated to make use of it; but all she could make of the odds and ends of statecraft she had gathered was, that England intended to make a raid upon Denmark. Full of her dishonourable intentions, she saw Prince Otto of Svir, and this time he saw that she had news of some importance. She dallied with him, coqueting with power, hinting and half divulging what she knew; but he stood too strong for her—the masculine nature was bound to triumph in such a contest.

At last she left off fencing, and told him that England meant to strike a sudden blow at Denmark, by seizing or sinking the Danish fleet. At the receipt of that news all his calm forsook him, all the polish of Russian courts vanished, and he became at once the untamed Tartar. An icy wrath took possession of him, a fierce cold pitiless passion shook him, and he trampled her womanhood, or all that she had left herself of womanhood, under his feet.

Such words fell from his lips in that moment of ungovernable fury as she had never heard, words that no gentlewomen should ever hear, words that carried shame and ignominy with them, words that stung and blistered her ears, her heart, her brain. The man was, for a few moments of time, a savage and a madman. He was not highly intellectual, but he had all the swift intuition, all the instincts of barbarian tribesmen, and the whole thing lay bare to him in a moment. He had been outwitted, a

more subtle brain than his own had outmanœuvred him. The secret that his imperial master had entrusted to him had leaked out somehow—he did not know, he could not guess; but his instinct told him that it was so. He stayed the mad torrent of his rage at last, and looked at the woman who was his dupe. She was crushed, humbled, cowed—she felt then how foul, how unclean, she was; a spy, a mere spy, in the tents of her brethren! He saw that he had gone too far to withdraw, to palliate; henceforth he must play the master, and let her feel the hand within the gauntlet; she had dared to play with the tempest, she must sink in the torrent. He knew what this would mean for him, this leakage of a great scheme, coupled with his engagement to the daughter of the most astute diplomat Great Britain owned. He closed his eyes and ground his big strong teeth, until the horrid noise made the shrinking woman shiver from head to foot. He knew that it would be said in St. Petersburg and in Paris that he, Otto of Svir, had been the toy of a woman. He knew that they would think that Jane Fiveash had bewitched him, and wound his secret out of him, tricking him like a boy, playing with him like a mere tyro—he who had been chosen by his master, because he had so often boasted that, of all human passions, love was the one which had the least influence over him.

“Go,” he said harshly to this dupe of his; “go, your news comes too late to be of service.”

For one wild moment Constance Stanleigh felt that she should like to kill him, to close his mouth, that foul brutal savage mouth, for ever. He saw the look in her eyes, saw it, and laughed at her.

“Pish,” he said, “that is not your rôle; you are scarcely up to the heroic standard, madame.” And

at that the shamed creature crept away, knowing that for her the gates of hope were closed for ever. And he, the untamed brute, sat with bent brows; thinking, thinking, and ever thinking, how to act to checkmate the British plan.

He went through every plan that flashed into his mind, but all were desperate. He dared not wait to communicate with St. Petersburg; he must chance everything on one bold cast of the dice; he must place himself directly in communication with Bonaparte, and let him act. He knew the risks he ran; knew what detection meant; but his whirlwind nature was aroused. At Portsmouth harbour lay a craft that a good many people thought guilty of many a breach of the laws of nations, but none knew how really bad she was. This was the *Johnny Sands*, a craft that traded at one time between Boston and Portsmouth, but had lately kept near home; a swift, formidable vessel, fit to make a good privateer, or even something worse if required. She was lying in Portsmouth harbour, ostensibly for the purpose of undergoing repairs, but in reality waiting the orders of Prince Otto of Svir; for, though she carried the British flag, she was no more British than he was. He had carefully kept out of communication with the ruffian who commanded her, because he had no intention of allowing his connection with this vessel to be suspected. It was of the *Johnny Sands* he thought at last; and by the time he had made up his mind what to do, there was little else in his thoughts but the *Johnny Sands*. An hour later, and a young Russian attaché was on his way to Portsmouth, from thence to France, with a verbal message to the man who at that hour almost dominated the world.

Having done all that he could do, Prince Otto

went to meet his affianced wife at her aunt's house, where a dance was to be held. Never had he appeared so courteous; never so chivalrous; never had he played the enslaved lover as he played it that night. He smiled into her bonny blue eyes, and chided her playfully on account of the slight pallor of her cheeks. He had not overburdened her with love-making before, and she had been thankful for it; but this night he made up for all his former coldness. Once when he had managed to get her all to himself, where no prying eyes could rest upon him, he had stolen kisses from the sweet English lips, and had strained her to him in so fierce a clasp that she had cried out in pain, and had turned from him in anger, all her maiden pride in arms against such treatment; and he, looking at her as she walked from his side, had muttered that, when he had her in his castle at Svir, he would make her rue the day when she and hers had tricked him. "Wait, my dainty little English lady," he muttered; "a time may come when you will know what it means to be wife to Otto of Svir: I will treat you as I would treat a Jewess who had stolen a passing fancy."

Well might Aunt Mary have cried, "Poor Jane, poor little Jane," when first she heard of the intended marriage. Brave as she was, the dainty Englishwoman shrank from her fate that night as she had never shrunk from it before. The grip of the man's arms, the fury of his kisses, the utter abandonment of everything else to mere animal passion, which his actions in that brief interview had betrayed, sickened her to her innermost soul. If she had had a mother she would have thrown herself into her arms and bared her heart to her, but the gods had willed it otherwise; she, poor maid, was mother-

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less, and only to a mother could a maid explain the revolt of a refined nature against the licence of untrammelled passion. Had she loved him, had all her nature gone out in sympathy to him, she might not have felt the full force of his coarseness as she did ; but loving another man, and that man a sailor full of old world chivalry towards women, the passion and the power of possession which the Russian had displayed thrilled her with shame. Yet she walked amidst the giddy, careless, chatting throng, hiding her secret under a mask of gaiety and pride, which deceived all but two who watched her.

Aunt Mary knew that, under that laughing face, a good woman's loyal brain was burning almost to the point of madness. And the worst is to come, she thought to herself. Wait until she is his bride ; wait until she has to sacrifice her womanhood, and lie a pliant toy in the hollow of his hands. Then, ah God, *then* she will know what sacrifices a woman has to make in this world ; for the bridal hour of such a woman to such a man means the crucifixion of a soul. Poor old Aunt Mary ! She was thinking of her own past, of her own girlhood, of her own bridal ; and even then, after the lapse of all those years, she shuddered at the recollection. For a man at the mercy of a man he loathes may have a foretaste of perdition, but a woman who has been at the mercy of a man she despises has known all that perdition can teach. Mr. Thornton, who had found time to put in an appearance at the rout, looked at the daughter of the house he loved, and his heart ached for her, for he knew what her fate would be in the hands of a man like Otto, Prince of Svir ; and he knew also how inexorable were the laws which governed the diplomacy of the times.

She shall not be sacrificed if I can prevent it,

he had promised himself; but how to prevent it he could not see, though he knew that in such whirling times anything might happen. Before he had left his lodgings that night he had received a visit from the night-rider, and had accepted the papers the man had brought. Vittles had ushered the man into his presence, and had discreetly withdrawn to watch lest Mr. Saxon might return and see the visitor; he did not know that Saxon had seen the night-rider, and had quaked with fear at the sight. Mr. Thornton, his acute Hebrew intellect all alive to the importance of the documents in front of him, had scanned the papers, and by means of the key had easily translated the cipher.

It had turned out as he had expected. The Russian had had the message in cipher, but the Frenchman had carried the key to it; one without the other would have been useless; and it had evidently been the intention of the two spies to have separated either at Leicester or at some smaller place on the way, for in the Russian's wallet Mr. Thornton found a letter from the Prince of Svir to the master of the ship, *Johnny Sands*, lying at Portsmouth, instructing him to give the bearer a passage to any port he might desire to go to, and to spare neither risk nor effort in getting him to his destination with all rapidity. The Frenchman's papers contained no such instructions, so that it was evident that he was to make other plans for himself; probably he had orders to make his way to France, and send or take his portion of the correspondence overland to the Russian court. In the prince's communications to his imperial master there was nothing of an incriminating character against Prince Otto; only a contemptuous reference to the poorness of the British army, as compared with that of France, and a general expression of

opinion that Bonaparte would find England an easy prey to his military talents if he ever landed an army in England.

To a casual reader the document would scarce have seemed worth all the trouble it had taken to obtain it; but Mr. Thornton, who knew the ways of Russian diplomats, could read between the lines; and he saw that Prince Otto had intended his imperial master to understand that, in his opinion, it was Russia's best plan to side with France against England, and be ready if need be to aid Bonaparte to invade the British Isles. The information contained in the despatch did not surprise Mr. Thornton in the least; he had expected just such a missive, and all his plans were ready; for it was part of his nature to be swift and decisive in emergencies—that was the real secret of his power; in time of ordinary happenings he was careful, methodical, and far-seeing; in emergencies he was swift, unerring, and resourceful. On this occasion he was ready for the situation that presented itself. Having read the despatches, he wrote the following message:—"To Count Von Arnheim, the Austrian Minister for War. Prince Otto of Svir, Russian plenipotentiary in London, has received despatches from St. Petersburg, which inform him of Bonaparte's intention to seize the Danish fleet now anchored off Copenhagen. Warn Denmark immediately." Having sealed this with great care and circumspection, he handed it to the night-rider, saying, "You have done well, sir, and have deserved your liberty for the service you have rendered your country. Now listen carefully to what I have to say. This despatch, addressed to Count Von Arnheim of Austria, must never reach him. Do you follow me?"

The night-rider nodded, and stood expectant.

Mr. Thornton continued, "It is my desire that this despatch shall fall into the hands of the French, but not in England, mind you; and it must only be obtained from you by fraud or force. Am I understood, sir?"

"I am to play the part of a despatch-rider who fails in his mission."

"Just so, my agents will never lose sight of you, and if you are taken prisoner I will cause an exchange to be made and obtain your liberty."

"Will I not be treated as a spy?"

"I have plenty of their agents here, men of some importance—one especially who is now lying wounded in Newgate prison; and I shall offer him in exchange for you, sir, and the French would gladly give a greater than you for him."

"How will the French know that I am the bearer of despatches?"

A smile leapt into Mr Thornton's eyes. "Leave that to me, young man; the French will know, and you will be followed from England. Do not be surprised if your old friend Mr. Saxon is on your heels; that man hates you for some reason of his own."

"Yes, I saved him from the hangman and told him he was a craven."

"That was doubtful policy; if you wanted to save the knave, why qualify the deed by telling him his character?"

"I am better with blade than brain."

"See that you keep both sharp on this errand, for you will need both."

"How shall I reach France?"

"Do you know Portsmouth?"

"Yes."

"Well, go there; find the *Johnny Sands* and go

on board ; but, as you value your life, let no one suspect that you think the craft is anything beyond a smuggler, though she is in the pay of our enemies."

"Will I be taken on board?"

"Yes ; the master is a knave of the worst dye, who will do anything for money. Tell him you are a highwayman escaped from Newgate, anxious to get out of England, and able and willing to pay for the privilege ; he will make room for you."

"And my horse?"

"I will see that your horse is seen to whilst you are upon my business. Now go, and some day I may forget that you ever harried the roads of England."

Having seen to the mission of the night-rider, Mr. Thornton had dressed himself for the evening and attended the rout, where he saw the Lady Jane suffering her heart's anguish. He watched her bravely bearing her sorrow, smiling under torture, and his heart seared somewhat by the great businesses which he had to play.

From day to day he warmed to the maid. His loyalty to her father and to her race appealed to him, and his feelings may have been apparent in his face. Or was it the magnetism which draws one human atom to another that made Jane Fiveash seek this strong, quiet, self-reliant man at such a time? Who can tell? Who of us all can tell the motive which prompts us to do half the things we do in life?

They met and talked, for from infancy she had known that he was one worth trusting. They talked of many things as they stood watching the butterfly crowd, drifting from one subject to another, until some remark of his, in which the title of the Deity was reverently mentioned, drew from her overwrought heart a bitter cry.

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"God sleeps, Mr. Thornton; I tell you, God sleeps, or such things as happen hourly could not happen."

He looked at her gravely, steadfastly, his strong, calm faith holding her petulant will and almost awing her.

"God sleeps, you say,—ah no, God never sleeps. When we are out of joint with the world we raise that cry—we who are no more than the dust the wind blows hither and thither; but God does not sleep."

"The Watcher on the tower never wearies."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SAILING OF THE SQUADRON

QUIETLY and with marvellous speed the British authorities had prepared a fleet and an army for the proposed attack upon the Danes. All the energies of a great people seemed to be thrown into the task, not that the enterprize in itself was a very tremendous undertaking—it was the surroundings that made the mission both delicate and dangerous; for if Bonaparte obtained information concerning the project, in time to intervene, his master intellect would devise some means to raise all the northern powers in arms against England.

Mr. Thornton, through his spies, had discovered the Danes were passive agents in the hands of Russia. They had sent the greater part of their army to Holstein, whilst their navy lay idle in the harbour in front of Copenhagen. Many of the ships of war were without ammunition for their guns, their crews were nearly all away on furlough, and the ships of war themselves were dismantled; so that when Bonaparte should sweep down upon them he could take them without a struggle, and add the Danish fleet to his own navy, for the purpose of invading England. Ireland was first of all to be taken, and then be used as a base of operations for French troops to act against England.

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The Danes had declined to act openly against Great Britain, but they did not want to offend both Russia and France and so deluge their country in blood. They had decided to remain passive and let the Frenchmen get their fleet. All this Mr. Thornton had easily discerned as soon as he got the key to the plan from Prince Otto's despatches; and the men who at that period ruled the destinies of Great Britain were men of steel, who allowed no man, either French Emperor or Teuton Kaiser, to dictate to them.

Lord Cathcart had been ordered to prepare and equip twenty-seven thousand men to act against the Danes by land, whilst Admiral Gambier received instructions to prepare a powerful squadron to sweep the Baltic and capture or sink every ship of war the Danes possessed.

At last the time for the commencement of hostilities had arrived. Sir Charles Fiveash was closeted with Lord Cathcart and Admiral Gambier, and Sir Charles was speaking with the full knowledge that the whole nation would back his words. "The figs are ripe," he said, "and now diplomacy ceases; and the soldier and the sailor must do the rest. Let the squadron make all sail to-night and turn neither to the right hand nor the left, make at once for Copenhagen, land the soldiers' midway between Elsinore and Copenhagen, run the squadron on to Copenhagen as soon as the troops are landed, and call upon the city to surrender. Capture the fleet or sink it; waste no time parleying; every hour you waste in words is a week won for Bonaparte. The Danes will call our action an outrage, a breach of faith, but this is no time for niceties of thought or feeling; the man we have to combat is one who has broken every law that nations respect. He has no respect for treaties; no compacts are binding

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upon him, except just so far as they suit his own purposes; you have only to obey and leave the righting of this matter to our statesmen. Be swift, be silent and be sure; Bonaparte must know nothing of this until our guns have spoken loud enough for all Europe to hear."

The sailor and the soldier, both of whom were men of action rather than of words, accepted their orders, and went away caring little for the diplomatic side of the affair. All they knew was, that they had definite orders to reduce Copenhagen, and take the fleet of Denmark, or send it to the bottom of the Baltic; concerning the rest, they knew little and cared less.

Clever as the general run of French spies were, they had been hoodwinked by British astuteness; upon this occasion no man in French pay had obtained an inkling of the squadron's destination. When the admiral gave the order to weigh anchor, Bonaparte's agents were completely in the dark as to our designs against Copenhagen. Only the treachery of Constance Stanleigh placed the squadron in jeopardy. If Prince Otto of Svir's agent failed him, nothing could prevent Admiral Gambier from winning the much-coveted prize before Bonaparte's eagle genius could strike, and the squadron was well upon its way before she had warned the Russian of Britain's intentions.

Two days after the squadron had weighed anchor the *Johnny Sands* made preparations for putting to sea; but, as an order had been issued by the Admiral of the Home Fleet, that no ship excepting a ship of war should leave a British port, without a special permit, the *Johnny Sands* found herself delayed for three more days. The master blustered and swore, but a gunboat prowling near him night and day warned him that he had better be careful in his

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movements, unless he wanted to fall foul of a King's craft; and though, on occasion, he would not have minded even that, if the odds were not too great, yet this time he had not a ghost of a chance of success, and did not know of any vital reason why he should run so great a risk. It is true that Prince Otto's messenger stormed at him for his delay and threatened to report him to the prince, but the threat had very little effect upon the seaman.

"Look here," he said to the Russian envoy, "Prince Otto sent you to me to give you a swift passage to the French coast, didn't he?"

"Yes; and instead of doing it you are hanging about in harbour."

"Yes, because I cannot get a permit to get out."

"Why don't you slip your cable and run past this cursed gunboat in the dark?"

"Because I should have to pass half a dozen gunboats lower down, and a dozen frigates too, and line-o'-battle ships as well; and I don't want my ship sent to the bottom; and I don't want to swing from a yard-arm, if I can help it."

"What does it all mean?" fumed the Russian.

"Don't know," was the laconic answer.

"Why don't you ask, why don't you demand a passport?"

"I did ask, and I did demand a passport, as you call it."

"What did they say?"

"Told me to go to the devil, and said the gunboat would send me there if I tried to get my ship out."

"Defy them, man; defy them—they won't dare to fire upon you."

"Look here, sir," said the captain impatiently, "you may know your own business, and know it well, but you don't know enough about a British naval officer

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to keep a child awake. Not dare to fire on us! Why, I tell you, if the man in charge of that gunboat had orders to sink us here in harbour, he'd do it as readily as he'd shave himself. If we were a regular Russian man-o'-war, he'd fire on us ten seconds after he got his orders to do so. I don't mind taking my share of fair risks, as long as I am well paid for doing it, but I won't tackle the British fleet to please any man."

So the Russian had to be content, though he was boiling inwardly with rage.

There were two other men on board the *Johnny Sands* who found the delay irksome, chiefly because it confined them to the little dens which did duty for cabins. One was our friend the night-rider, and the other was that very Russian whom he had robbed upon the Leicester road. This worthy had at first thought of making his way back to Russia without consulting the prince, intending to trust to the chapter of accidents to clear him of his failure; but, as all his money had disappeared with his papers, he came to the conclusion, that the best thing he could do under the circumstances was to go to the prince, and confess that he had been robbed. He had hired from the innkeeper a hackney to take him to London, leaving as security for payment the Frenchman's damaged mare. As for the Frenchman himself, he was too much injured by his fall to want to shift for some time. It was a grossly garbled story that he told Prince Otto. The solitary robber who had vanquished him grew to a band of five or six desperate men, who had suddenly charged upon him and his companion from a cross-road, and shot their horses, and beat himself and comrade to a state of unconsciousness, and then cleared them out of everything—money, jewels, and all else.

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"Did they search your clothing for the papers?" asked Prince Otto.

"Yes, Excellency."

"Then, fool, they were not highwaymen, but King's men. We have been betrayed by some one in our pay. Take this purse, and get out of the country as quickly as possible; you are of no more service to me here."

So the fellow had taken passage to Portsmouth, and in due season had boarded the *Johnny Sands*, little dreaming that the man who had brought about his downfall was on the same ship. He did not become aware of that fact until the *Johnny Sands* had put to sea, when, thinking he might safely venture on deck to take the air after the stuffy darkness of his cabin, almost the first person his eyes fell upon was the night-rider. At first he thought that the uncomfortable motion of the vessel had caused his brain to whirl; but a second glance convinced him that he had made no mistake. The man he looked at was undoubtedly the very man who had handled him so scurvily upon the highway. Drawing his hat well down over his eyes, and muffling all the lower part of his face in his cloak, he paced the deck watching his enemy, determined, if possible, to get back, not only the valuables he had lost, but to take revenge as well. But his cup of surprise was not yet full, for, after he had been on deck about an hour, the young Russian attaché, who was Prince Otto's messenger to Bonaparte, came on deck, and he at once recognised him, for he had seen him often in the company of the prince. Quickly the suspicion dawned in his mind that this was the spy who had betrayed Otto of Svir's plans, else why was he on board the same ship as the man who had robbed him? Why were the two men going to France together? What scheme was this

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that he had fallen in with? He would wait and watch, and, if possible, take steps to frustrate their plans. It did not lessen his suspicions when he saw that the two men he was keeping under surveillance did not speak to each other. That may be part of their schemes, thought he, so he remained suspicious and alert.

The *Johnny Sands* did not head direct for France, but steered a course which would give her a plausible excuse for being where she was, if she should have the bad luck to come in contact with a British man-o-war; but good fortune and good seamanship helped the smuggler through, and, towards the middle of the second night, the *Johnny Sands* lay as close in as she dared get to the low-lying coast of France. A couple of boats were lowered, and some cargo that was far from guiltless was run ashore. None of the three passengers were sent by the boats on the first trip. Possibly the master of the *Johnny Sands* had his own reasons for that; but, when the first boat returned laden to the water's edge with French brandy and other marketable goods, the master of the hybrid craft called his three passengers together, and told them curtly to tumble over the side into the boat, for he intended to put them ashore.

The night-rider obeyed without a word, but the attaché, who wanted to be landed somewhere where he could get into immediate communication with Paris, refused to obey the order; but the master of the *Johnny Sands* became blasphemous in his ill-humour at the other's importunity, cursing him for a land-lubber who knew nothing of the dangers and difficulties of the blockade-running business. "You come aboard and say, do this and do that, go here and go there; but you never think that at any hour I may have a British gunboat in my wake, or a shot

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from a sloop-of-war rattling through my rigging. You don't know what you are asking, or what you are risking, for if we are caught off this coast, and you are found aboard, you may find it harder to convince a man-o'-war skipper that you are not a French spy than anything you have tried yet. And they have a rough way of dealing with spies in the navy, I tell you, for on his own quarter-deck a man-o'-war skipper don't care a rope's end for any man-Jack of all the big-wigs ashore, and would string you up as soon as look at you, and report it perhaps in a year's time—if he didn't forget it. So over with you, and be quick."

"I won't go ashore here in that boat," was the angry retort.

"Very well, swim ashore then! Over the side with him, and be d——d to him," cried the skipper, to his second in command.

The next moment the attaché was over the side, and in the boat; he had no fancy for swimming. They made a strange trio those men, each suspicious of the other, and each on the alert. They were bundled from the ship's boat into a fishing craft, and in a few minutes found themselves deposited upon the shore near a mean little fishing village, where every eye that fell upon them was hostile. There was only one inn, and that of the poorest and roughest kind; but, rude as it was, it was all the shelter they could hope for, for not a householder in the place would have given them shelter, so great was the fear of the French police spy business implanted in the minds of the fisher-folk. Men had gone to the guillotine for much less than giving a stranger shelter during those dark days, and no one felt like risking such dangers for three men who had no claim upon them.

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They sat in the common room of the inn, and each had some salted fish, a bottle of poor wine, and a loaf of coarse brown bread placed in front of him. They ate in silence, the man who had been robbed on the roads turning his back upon the other two, so that neither might recognise him, whilst the doorway and window of the hostel were filled with faces of gaping visitors. The attaché was the first to rise from his frugal meal, and at once began to make inquiries as to the chance of hiring a horse or a conveyance to take him upon his journey; but no saddle-horse was obtainable. After some demur, a wretched conveyance, capable of holding two persons and the driver, was procured, and this the attaché proceeded to possess; but the night-rider, who had no mind to stay in his wretched quarters, begged leave to share it with him, offering to pay half the expense. This the attaché curtly refused, but the Englishman stood firm. "If it comes to that," said he, "I have as much right as yourself to the conveyance, such as it is, and I will either have part of it or the whole." So, with a bad grace, the other gave way, and the two men, whose mission blended so strangely, though neither knew it, started off together, looking fiercely at each other, as they rumbled slowly along. The other Russian, who had been vainly scouring the village upon his own behalf in search of a horse, arrived back at the inn just in time to see the other pair leaving. This convinced him that his original suspicions were correct. As the rickety conveyance rumbled off, he rushed to the gendarme, and informed him that the two men just disappearing from the village were English spies, who had been landed for the purpose of betraying France to the perfidious Briton. The gendarme, who was dying with anxiety to prove his zeal to his

superiors, at once raised a hue and cry. All the small boys in the place darted off on foot across the fields, to intercept the driver of the tumble-down conveyance, and warn him, in the name of the law, not to proceed, as his passengers were spies freshly arrived from London. The boys, eager as boys always are for excitement, sped off on their errand, whilst the men and women, too, of San Jacques, followed none the less willingly, though more heavy of foot. The men, in their big sea-boots, lumbered painfully, whilst the women kicked their short, red or blue kirtles up as they ran, and at regular intervals of a few yards, dropped their clumsy, wooden clogs, and had to stop to pick them up again; but they came up with the fugitives at last, for the boys, cutting off corners of fields, had soon overhauled the broken-kneed old nag, which now stood rattling its ancient harness by the wayside. The boys, as they came up, had yelled to the driver that the passengers were spies; and the man, with all the love of his nation for things theatrical, had stopped the rushing torrent of his four-mile-an-hour speed, and, leaping to the ground, seized the horse by the head, striking just such an attitude as he would have done had he been holding Bonaparte's fiery grey Arab stallion by the bridle. The old nag, being an ancient Flemish mare, had no sense of French humour, so, resting his aged, wrinkled muzzle on the man's bare forearm, went placidly to sleep in the sunshine; but the driver, nothing daunted, kept up his heroic attitude, just as though he upheld the eagles of France in the teeth of a foe; and, what is more, he revelled in the situation, for your Frenchman has no sense of proportion, and will revel in a situation that would cover an Englishman with shame and confusion on account of its ludicrous nature. As

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soon as the vehicle stopped, the night-rider stepped promptly into the road, and stood awaiting developments, his hand upon his sword-hilt; but the Russian attaché, who was a young man of choleric disposition, sat in the vehicle, and cursed the driver, and the boys, and the horse, and all things else under the sun.

When the crowd arrived, and, with an infinite amount of shouting and gesticulating, demanded the surrender of the two foreigners, the Russian shrugged his shoulders and implored the good French people to allow him to proceed to Paris, where he had business of the gravest nature. The Englishman, on the other hand, faced the mob, who threatened him with pitchforks and clubs and all kinds of old weapons, and, drawing his sword, let the point rest upon the toe of his boot. As he stood there, frowning upon the crowd, he caught sight of the Russian whom he had robbed on the road between London and Leicester, and one glance told him that this time the tables were turned upon him. The French gendarme came forward with dramatic impressiveness and demanded the Englishman's sword.

"Which do you want, the point or the edge?" was the reckless reply. "Don't come too close, or I will give you one or both."

The Frenchman drew back, and made a speech—it is wonderful how little provocation a Frenchman needs to make a speech at any time—and the crowd applauded. Mobs always do applaud the strongest side—it is mob gospel; they applauded the crucifixion, and were the first to claim its benefits when the veil was lifted.

But, though the French were theatrical, they were not cowardly, and after a time they rushed the Englishman, and, though he fought desperately, he

was at last overborne by numbers, and was borne off, bruised and bleeding, to a stable, at the back of the inn, where he and the attaché were imprisoned, whilst the gendarme communicated with Paris. Several days passed in this manner, when at last an important personage arrived from the French metropolis to investigate the affair. He was a man who knew something of his duties, and at once impounded the documents the stupid gendarme had taken from the Englishman. He was a rather brave fellow himself, and the Englishman's bold and defiant manner pleased him far more than that of the Russian attaché.

When he had scanned the documents taken from the night-rider, he said, "So, sir, you are an English agent?"

"Yes," was the unabashed retort, "an English agent bound for the Austrian Court."

"What were you doing upon French soil?"

"I crossed the Channel in an English ship, but we were driven to land here because we were chased by a French frigate."

"Ah, you are unfortunate, *messieur*, you will be shot as a spy!"

"If I am, there are half a dozen French agents in English prisons who will share the same fate."

"You are a bold man, and I, who am myself a soldier, know how to appreciate boldness," was the courteous reply. "I will myself take your despatches on to the great Napoleon; he will know how to deal with you, *messieur*. Are your wounds being attended to; and your food, is it to your liking?"

"As for my wounds," replied the night-rider, "they are doing well enough; but the wine they give me makes my stomach cry out every time I drink it; I would not wash a dog with such poor, sour stuff."

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The Frenchman smiled. "I know the belly-aching rubbish they keep hereabouts, *messieur*, and I will see to it that some good French brandy shall take its place. He was very amiable to the bluff fellow, who spoke up for himself like a soldier, and did not whine about hardships, or call a few cuts "mortal wounds." With the Russian *attaché*, he was different. That young gentleman had thought fit to adopt a haughty tone, demanding to know why the subject of a friendly power should be set upon and imprisoned by Frenchmen. To which the officer had replied, shrewdly enough, that if the subjects of a friendly power thought fit to land by stealth on the French coast, he must put up with any inconvenience that might arise. The Russian then declared that he had a message of the utmost importance for the ear of Bonaparte, a statement which the official treated with incredulity and contempt. "If you have a despatch hidden, give it me, and I will take it on for you." The Russian answered that it was a verbal message, which he had been charged to give to no one but the great Corsican himself.

"Bah!" retorted the Frenchman, "we hear a hundred stories a day of that sort, in Paris. You will have to remain here until the Russian minister, now in Paris, clears you of all guilt." And in spite of the oaths, and curses, and threats of the *attaché*, he went upon his way well satisfied that the Russian was an impostor.

CHAPTER XXIII

BONAPARTE

AT this period of his career Napoleon Bonaparte was at the apex of his power. He had conquered the world practically, with the exception of England, and the greatest soldiers of his day looked upon him as well-nigh invincible. He had risen from a paltry rank in the French army to be its leader and its idol. He had deposed his king and grasped the crown for himself. Never, since the almost forgotten days when Attila overran Europe with his barbarian horde, had such a man as he so filled the eye of the world. He would have stood still if he had dared to stand still; but the very forces he had called into being forced him onward to his fall, like one who starts a forest fire to clear a pathway for himself, and sees the winds fan the flames into immeasurable volume, which compel him to go forward or perish. He had roused the volatile French nation to such a point that they considered they could dominate humankind. He knew they were in error, and he tried to stem the current of their madness, but the whip he had made for his foes hung even over his own head. He was the figurehead of the people, not the people's master; he dared not say to them, "Peace, be still," for in such stillness his own power would crumble to decay. He had risen at the point

of the bayonet, and the bayonet alone could keep him upon his pedestal; and no man knew this better than the man himself. A mighty military genius, with a base ignoble soul, he did not deserve to stand long overtopping the world. How base he was at heart, his marriage with the cast-off mistress of Barras, his own patron, proved. Our own great hero, Nelson, failed in his domestic duties by allying his fortunes, out of sheer love, to a woman of rank whose touch soiled him. But he was loyal to her even in his dying moments. But Bonaparte was foul all through—foul to the bone. He had neither magnanimity nor loyalty. Look at him, this conqueror of kings, this mighty butcher, in all his relations to Josephine. See him when he met her first—he the practically unknown adventurer, she the courted beauty, in the full flush of her East Indian sensuousness. He scarcely dared lift his eyes to her, though all Paris—gay, wanton, profligate Paris—knew that she, the widow of an honourable man, was the well-paid mistress of a minister who was even then filling his pockets from the nation's purse.

Watch the next step. Barras tiring of his toy the widow more than tired of her elderly keeper; Bonaparte standing with covetous eyes fixed upon the command of the French army in Italy, but possessing neither achievements nor influence to recommend him to the post. Barras has the gift of the post in his pocket. He has a deep purse to dip into—the public purse—and a mistress who is beginning to embarrass him. He offers three things to the impecunious genius: money he has stolen from the nation, a soiled woman, and the command of the French army in Italy; and Bonaparte takes all three, and takes them willingly. For a time the skilled blandishments of the woman who had been notorious,

even in a society that had no equal in its time for profligacy, held him to her. His morals were the morals of the camp, his manners the manners of the barrack-room, his desires the desires of a moss-trooper. The woman and the man were well met. How the command of the French army suited the man all Europe soon knew.

Watch him as he rises to power. Note how he treats the woman who had been a stepping-stone for him. He first makes the great ones of the earth bow to her, because he himself has bowed, and then he spurns her from him because she has borne him no child. Had she borne him a dozen, he would have found some pretext to rid himself of her. Notice how he treats Barras, the minister who gave him soiled money, a soiled woman, and a general's commission. He drives him out of public life—drives him into retirement—drives him from the stage where he had been an actor so long. How different to the mighty Englishman, the peerless Nelson, the man who, in reality, crushed him, and made all his military triumphs of none effect. Nelson soiled nothing, though his one weakness soiled his fame. The two peoples, the French and the English, seem to stand breast to breast in those two men, Nelson and Bonaparte. The Frenchman's first thought in his hour of power was to get rid of the erring woman who, frail as she was, gave him the chance he pined for. The Englishman's last thought as he gasped out his life, with the cheers of his Vikings ringing in his ears, was how to succour the erring woman who had brought him nothing but a woman's passion and a woman's shame.

At the time of our story he had dropped all those little tricks of speech, those little acts by which he won his soldiers and the frothing mob to the belief

that he was one of them. Cold, silent, sullen, he stood alone whilst a world fawned at his feet; friendless and unloved, all his old comrades in arms pushed behind him or trodden under foot. His pale face, which never smiled, indexed the cold, grey devil that lurked always in his heart. Intellect sat enshrined in every lineament of his features—intellect, but no heart. He was great as the devil is great—great in his foulness. This day even his iron nature showed signs of tiredness. He had planned a campaign that was to involve the loss of a quarter of a million lives; and so minute had been his calculations that every soldier's rations, every round of ammunition, every great-coat to be worn, every horse in the transport waggons, had been provided for. He had sat for hours discussing law with the leading advocates of the day, and had then stripped all the formalities from the forensic knowledge, and dictated the laws in plain, terse language to his secretary, so simplified that any clod in rural France could understand and obey them. Later on he had formulated a scheme of taxation, which would reach those who could afford to pay, and leave intact those who could barely subsist. He was great, this little devil in human guise; his mind enveloped continents, and yet concentrated itself around the minor points of municipal detail. To him came a courier, who told him a British squadron, under Admiral Gambier, was blowing Copenhagen to pieces. Later came another, who said that a British force, under Lord Cathcart, was storming the Danish capital from the landward side. He never moved a muscle of his pale face—that face which possessed all the Asiatic power of immobility, when he willed it to remain immobile. A weaker man would have stormed and raged; he only stormed with bayonets and raged with charging squadrons.

It was too late for him to intervene when the British squadron held the Baltic. He knew that his plans had leaked out, and his suspicious nature made him look upon Russia as his betrayer. From boyhood he had been surrounded by intrigue; all his life had been passed amidst men who were scheming for the downfall of others. Hence it was only natural that he should look for treachery where only misadventure existed. He was in this frame of mind when Fouché, his Chief of Police, brought him word that an envoy from England, bound to the Austrian minister, Von Arnheim, had been captured, after a desperate resistance, near the village of San Jacques, and that important despatches, relating to the bombardment of Copenhagen, had been found upon him.

"Never mind the man; bring me the despatches."

"What shall be done with the man, sire?"

"Shoot him."

"Certainly, sire; but I have to inform you that some of our agents are in the hands of the English, and they will certainly hang them if we shoot this man," replied Fouché, "And I would point out to your Majesty that every day it becomes harder to obtain good men to act as agents amongst the islanders."

"How is it, Fouché, that you, who succeed everywhere else, fail in England?"

The great Minister of Police bowed low before the implacable man who interrogated him. "Because, sire," he answered, "there is in England a man with a master mind, who sees everything, and neglects nothing."

"Who is that man?"

"He has a double identity, sire. In English society he figures as Mr. Thornton, in financial circles he is Mr. Gotschalk."

"I never heard of him."

"Few have, sire; but he is a great power; his hands are on a thousand strings, and he pulls them as he needs them."

Bonaparte mused in silence for a while; then, without lifting his chin from his chest, where he had let it sink, he raised his dull, dead, black eyes, those eyes that saw all and revealed nothing.

"Mr. Gotschalk," he said; "is he a Jew?"

"Yes, sire, a Jew."

"Then buy him over to our cause."

"There are Jews and Jews, sire, just as there are Frenchmen and Frenchmen; some you can buy, some are beyond price. This man is beyond the reach of gold. If you offered him the crown of Italy, or of Austria, or of Prussia, to betray England, he would laugh in your face—he is a man of character, sire."

A savage sneer flashed across Bonaparte's face. "Ah," he retorted, "a man of character; then he would indeed be out of place in France; here we only need men of talent—character is not a material necessity."

Fouché bowed again. Of all the Corsican's ministers he perhaps feared his master the least. Perhaps it was because in all his dealings with the Chief of Police Bonaparte displayed only the smaller side of his nature, just as with his generals he only showed the greater side of his complex character.

"You know this man Thornton or Gotschalk, do you, Fouché?"

"I have felt his influence in half the capitals of Europe, sire."

"What does he owe to England that he should serve her with a loyalty beyond price?"

"A debt of gratitude, sire."

"Is that all, Fouché?"

"To a Jew who has the blood of a hundred kings in his veins, it is more than enough, sire."

"Does he hate France so much then?"

"No, sire, he does not hate France at all, except as England's foe; otherwise he is well disposed to France."

"Buy him, Fouché; heap honour, wealth, power upon him; dazzle him with glory, with pride of place, with dreams of greatness; tell him that Bonaparte will do more for the Jew than any man born of woman has ever done; tell him that I will conquer Palestine and hand it back to the Jewish nation as a free gift, that they may take their place once more as a great people."

"In reward for what, sire; the betrayal of the British nation?"

"What else?"

"Then let me tell you, sire, the Jew is beyond your reach; you cannot dazzle him with any greatness that you can confer upon him, because he looks upon himself as greater than all the monarchs of Europe, in regard to blood and breeding; the descendant of David and Solomon thinks nothing of crowns that yesterday were in the dust. Why, sire, his pedigree was ancient when David was herding sheep upon the hillsides of his native land. You cannot buy him; if you laid the treasure-chests of France before him, and bade him dip his arms elbow-deep in them, he would refuse you on your terms, sire. You bid me tell him what you will do for the Jew, and he will retort by pointing to what England *has* done for his people, and for him."

"Enough!" cried Bonaparte harshly, "bring me the despatches found upon the Englishman."

"I have them with me, sire."

“Give them to me?”

Fouché obeyed, and Bonaparte read the message to Count von Arnheim.

“So,” he said at last, “the Russian is playing the old, old game, but this shall cost the Muscovite dear; retire, M. Fouché, and send my secretary to me.”

“What shall I do with the Englishman who brought these despatches, sire?”

“What do you wish me to do with him?”

“Exchange him, sire.”

“Well, well, he counts for nothing in the game; exchange him or shoot him—it matters nothing to me; do as you think best.”

As soon as Fouché had withdrawn Bonaparte set to work to formulate a scheme to embarrass Russia. A secret note was despatched to the Czar, charging him with treachery and a betrayal of the plans agreed upon by Bonaparte and the Russian Emperor at Tilsit. The despatch further drew attention to the proposed marriage between Prince Otto of Svir and the Lady Jane Fiveash, and drew attention to the fact that upon all sides English sentiment had recently undergone a marked change in regard to Russia; and the gorgeous fêtes raised in honour of Russian personages of importance were cited as proof that an understanding existed between London and St. Petersburg. This note from Bonaparte was couched in such arrogant terms that it immediately snapped the cordial relations that had hitherto existed between France and Russia, and would doubtless have driven Russia into the arms of England had it not been for the capture of the Danish fleet by Great Britain, and the reduction of the Danish capital.

This act of Britain's towards the Danes made the

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Russians doubly suspicious of England. But Bonaparte's fears, that Russia had played him false, made him fear to trust the loyalty of the northern powers, and the long-intended coalition fell to the ground for the time being; and England scored a signal success, not in diplomacy alone, but by the triumph of her army and her fleet against the Danes. She let the world see that France was not yet mistress of the world.

Captain George Fiveash had been employed in the taking of the fleet of the Danes, and his conduct won for him the well-deserved praise of his admiral, who took occasion to bring his personal service to the notice of the Prince of Wales, who used his great influence to push the seaman's fortunes; so that it was not long before he became a figure in English naval affairs. But to the sailor this personal advantage brought but little joy; for the main dream of his life was dead and buried. He had loved his cousin with a great love; and when it was conveyed to him that she had plighted her troth to Prince Otto of Svir, it seemed to the honest, simple-minded sailor that all that was best in the world had died. He did nothing melodramatic or heroic, to show his cousin that he had loved her with all his soul; he simply remembered that he was a sailor, carrying his King's commission and his country's honour in his hands; and whenever or wherever he obtained a chance to prove himself worthy of his position, he did so. Perhaps those who served immediately under him found him a little more harsh than of old, and those who were his equals missed the ready laugh and the careless jest; but in all else he was the same bold, honourable, bluff son of the sea, who had laid his heart at the feet of the dainty little gentlewoman who was so soon to become a Russian princess.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MARTYRDOM OF JANE FIVEASH

IT was not long before Prince Otto of Svir received from his imperial master striking proof that he had lost the confidence of the Russian court. He was informed that he might consider himself henceforth as on a visit to England in his private capacity. He was also informed that Russia would carry on negotiations with England through another channel, and that when he did return to Russia he was to betake himself at once, and, without attempting to present himself at court, to his own domain in Svir.

He was not to be publicly degraded from the army, but his rank would only be a nominal one, as the Emperor would have no future use for his services in any active capacity.

He was allowed no chance of defending himself, he was not permitted to even petition the throne for a trial, and he knew the nature of his countrymen too well to make any such attempt. His ruin and his degradation was complete. His mad wrath when he received this ultimatum knew no bounds. At one time he thought of throwing up his national life and seeking service in the army of Bonaparte, where adventurers were always welcome; but the thought of losing for ever the huge estates he had, curbed his spleen in that direction. At other times

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he thought of breaking off his marriage with Jane Fiveash, and provoking a quarrel with her brother, Charles; but, since he had been in England, he had learned to know that the quiet, self-contained young diplomat was a duellist not to be despised by the most reckless men of the time. Then the devilish thought grew upon him that he might find a sterner vengeance by forcing on the marriage, and hiding his disgrace until he had his bride safely lodged in the heart of the Russian wilderness of pines; and to this end he hastened on the nuptials.

His betrothed was his best ally in this scheme, for, to her tortured nerves, anything was better than delay.

So the wedding took place, and the daintiest, bonniest little gentlewoman in all England went to the arms of this half-tamed Tartar, as a ewe to the shambles; and her martyrdom commenced. Scarcely had the marriage been consummated ere Otto of Svir took his wife to her far-off northern home. When it came to parting with her father, she bore up bravely, for the old man was failing fast, and she did not want to embitter his last days upon earth; but when she was alone with her brother, for the last time, she let some of the horror that lurked in her soul creep into her eyes, and he saw it and wondered.

"Charles," she said, clasping his hands in her own; "Charles, when we were little children we played together, and we loved each other and had no secrets from one another; let me speak now, Charles, as we used to speak in those old dead days. I am going away to a new land to make a home with a man my father chose for me, for reasons of State. I gave up all a woman holds precious, in order that our name might not be soiled; you know I would not lie,

Charles, to you or to anyone; and I want to say to you that, since I have been married, I have learned that which makes me know that if you marry Constance Stanleigh, you will find the name of Fiveash soiled. Promise me, Charles, that, no matter what may happen, you will not give that—that—woman our name."

Slowly, very slowly, with cold deliberation, her brother put her clinging hands from him.

"Your husband has told you something concerning Constance Stanleigh. Jane, what is it?"

"I cannot; I must not tell you more than I have told you, Charles."

"You are *my* sister—tell me all."

"I am *his* wife—I cannot."

"Then he shall, if I force it from his lips with the point of the pistol."

"And bring shame on your sister for divulging her husband's secrets. Shall it go out to the world, Charles, that even the secrets of the bedchamber are not safe with a Fiveash?"

"Let him tell me as one man to another; he is my relative now."

"Would to God that he were not, Charles! No, no, you must not, you shall not ask him; for he would glory in telling you, and not you alone, for if he opens his mouth to you, he will tell all London."

"Tell me this much, Jane, has she been—is she his—?"

"Hush! I will tell you what she is. It is fitting that I should speak of these things, I, who am a bride of a fortnight. She is a Russian spy. She is his, soul and body. He has used her, and crushed her, until there is no womanhood left in her; she stole from her sick uncle's wandering lips secrets of State, and handed

those secrets over to Otto of Svir. She is his to the end of time, and if you marry her, knowing what you do, may your father curse you with his last breath, as I shall, for you will make my sacrifice vain and of none effect!"

"I will make you a widow within twenty hours," he answered steadily.

"And set every scandalous tongue in England and in Europe busy with my name, Charles. You shall not soil me to avenge Constance Stanleigh. Had you forced this quarrel on the Prince of Svir before he was my husband, I should have thanked my God for giving me a brother; but not now, Charles—all that you can do is to keep your name pure; for that purpose I warned you against the woman you have worshipped. Now Charles, dear Charles, good-bye; and if you ever take your father's place, and men say that, young as you are, you show signs of greatness, do this one thing for me." She bent her lips to his ear and whispered for a moment, and then she fled from the room.

"Good God!" he murmured, "Cousin George, our sailor cousin! By my soul, I wish that she had had him, for a British sailor is a better mate for a British maid than a foreign prince. Curse on her silly whimsies; why did she not say openly at the first, 'I love him, and I'll have him, or I'll have no man?'"

Perhaps old withered Aunt Mary had a better insight into Jane Fiveash's soul than any other human being. "Poor little Jane," she had kept repeating, as the young wife clung to her in the agony of the last interview.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, if I had married a gentleman it would not have been so hard to bear; but this man is a human horror, a white savage. He is all polish and suavity to the world; but for me, his wife, he saves

the manners and the customs of barbarians. He has never used a rough word to me ; it is what he calls his love that appals me. I tell you, Aunt Mary, I dread with a fearful dread the evening shadows ; for I am, God help me, I am wedded to a devil."

And Aunt Mary, who knew something of what the girl was passing through, though she had never dreamt of a tithe of the iniquities that lay in that marriage—not even though she had herself been forced to marry the most dissolute old roué in all England—kept on murmuring, with trembling lips, "Poor little Jane, poor little Jane!"

As the ship that was to bear the prince and his bride moves slowly from the crowded harbour, the knot of friends who had gathered to say farewell stood upon the shore and waved their hands.

"Good-bye to England," said the prince, and, as he spoke, he fixed upon her face a look that made her quail, brave as she was. It was the glance of a devil unchained. Something in that look of mingled passion and hate frightened her, as she had never in all her life before been frightened. The passion was not the hot, heady passion of a voluptuary, but the cold, fierce brutality of a savagely strong nature—a man of such a temperament as that was only fit to mate with a woman dead to every law but physical passion. Her nerve forsook her. She gave a cry and stretched out her arms as if appealing for help, and he, stooping, swept her up in his arms, and carried her across the deck towards her cabin. She tried to struggle ; but the arm that held her so close to the broad breast could have held an ordinary man still with ease. Her women pressed round her, but he drove them back with a look.

"The princess is ill ; her heart is sore for her dear

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English friends," and, looking down into her eyes, he laughed, and all her soul sickened.

"O God!" she murmured, "is there no God to help me?"

"None," he sneered; "the gods are dead."

At that moment a man in the little crowd on shore raised his voice, and sent a strange piercing cry across the waters.

"The Watcher on the tower never wearies."

This strange cry reached her ears just as she was swooning; she knew the voice, knew the meaning of the message; knew that wherever she went the children of Israel would be ready to help her hand and foot; knew also that the strange, silent man, who had been her father's friend, was bidding her put her trust in One who never wearies. Prince Otto heard the cry, and he, too, knew its meaning; for that cry had met the men of his house for generations, when they stained their hands in crime. He wheeled round, with his beautiful burden in his arms, and gazed long and steadily at the group of people on the shore; but saw no one whom he could identify with the cry. As he gazed, the ship surged steadily forward; but still he stood there with something that was almost fear dawning in his heart; for, in the long struggle with the Jews, his house had felt their power many a time. As he stood, his great bulk bent slightly forward, his arms wound round his wife's slender form, her skirts trailing upon the deck, her hair falling loosely over the hollow of his right arm, the ship passed across the bows of a British man-of-war riding at anchor; and in the bows, dressed in full uniform, stood an officer on duty. It was the cousin of the Princess of Svir, Captain George Fiveash. The sailor from his position could look down upon the deck of the passing vessel. He saw the

Russian prince ; saw the white face of the woman he had loved ever since he was a boy ; saw the horror and the fear, the shame and the loathing, in the lovely face. She looked up at that moment, her soul drawn by the magnetic force of his love, and their eyes looked into each others. Men were standing by the captain's side, who had known him for nearly a lifetime ; men who had sailed the seas with him in time of storm and stress ; men who had faced the perils of the deep, side by side with him a hundred times ; men who had fought elbow to elbow, foot to foot with him, when the chances of battle were all against them ; men who loved him as sailors do love a gallant comrade. And, when they saw his face that day, and saw what he was looking upon, they turned their eyes away ; for his grief was too terrible for a true man to look upon.

“God's curse upon the Russian prince,” said one old salt to a comrade, as he moved a pace or two away. “I'd give a year's pay to take a boat's crew and go aboard and bring the English lady back ; she's too dainty for such a cut-throat land-shark as that.”

Prince Otto did not see the look that passed between the cousins ; he was too busy gloating over his triumph. She was his now to torment and torture with his coarseness, his Tartar lewdness ; and he understood why she shuddered in his arms, understood why the light in his eyes sickened her soul—understood, and revelled in the understanding. He carried her to their cabin. At the door, whilst his hands were on the handle, she gave one piteous little cry, and put out her hand, as though she would cling to the portals, and stop him from carrying her into what should have been a young bride's sanctuary, but which was as the entrance of hell to her. He pushed

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her hand away; the door yielded to his touch, opened, and closed again, and she was alone with him.

He bent his head, and kissed her on the mouth; she put out her palms, and pushed his face from hers, and he chuckled. Of a truth the young matron had learned, in that one short fortnight of married life, that for a refined woman the world held worse things than death.

CHAPTER XXV

AT SVIR

NO sooner had Otto, Prince of Svir, arrived at Moscow, than he received a peremptory order to remove himself at once to his own estates; none of his former friends or associates came near him.

He was shunned as though he had the pestilence; even the rabble, hearing of his downfall, sought out his lodging-place and heaped every species of insult within their power upon him. His ruin was far-reaching and complete. A cry had gone through the capital that he had sold holy Russia to her foes, that he had betrayed the trust of his Emperor, that he was in league with his country's foes. He had made many enemies, and none of them were idle in the moment of his need. He who, in his hour of greatness, had treated the common people as if they were lower than the very swine, now knew what it was to feel the blind hate of mobs.

The slums emptied themselves, and the human garbage of a city, greater in extent than Paris, flocked around his abode and howled at him; they would have rent him limb from limb if they could have got their hands upon him, those unkempt despots of the gutters.

He had not a friend, not a well-wisher, in all that great city; men who, previous to his fall, had fawned

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upon him for his favours, ready to lick his hands as dogs lick platters, now shouted infamous names in the street in front of his home, and dared him to show himself. And in that seething multitude moved men, whose hooked noses and brilliant eyes proclaimed their race; they were the descendants of that remnant of Hebrews who had escaped from the village of Svir in his grandfather's time, and they sought an eye for an eye.

Whenever the mob seemed to weary of its hate, one of these men would cry, "Do you remember how he rode through the market-place with his troop on such and such a day, cutting down the men, trampling the women and the children beneath his horse's feet."

Or, another would shout, "Have you forgotten how he bade his soldiers fire upon the students in the streets of Moscow? Have you forgot? Why, the stones are still red with the blood of the boys."

And at that the Russian women would rush at the great iron-bound door, and tear at it with their hands until the flesh came away from the bones. Only once did Otto of Svir show himself to the people. He was sitting in an upper room, and his young wife sat in the same apartment with him. They could hear the clamour outside, they caught the deep-toned roar of men's voices, and the shrill cries and screams of women; and the young wife smiled drearily, for she knew that her father's diplomacy had fallen short of its object. What a welcome for a bride was this, what a homecoming! Yet it did not hurt her as much as if she had been welcomed with the plaudits of multitudes, and smiles, and songs, and laughter. She could bear this—that other thing would have driven her mad or desperate.

The clamour of the straining mob roused the last devil in Prince Otto's blood. "Come," he said,

“come and see the fruits of the Anglo-Russian alliance; come and see how your people are loved abroad.”

She rose quietly, and walked to the window with him. A silence, like that which falls upon the sea, fell upon the people. Prince Otto opened his purse, and sent a shower of gold into the middle of the street; and men and women, who were almost starving, caught the gold, and putting it in their mouths, spat it out at the walls of his house. Then a cry burst from the multitude, a cry that had no words; a cry so awful, so savage, so intense, that he, brave as he was physically, drew back from the open window, cowed—the very marrow in his bones standing stagnant, chilled by the venom of that burst of hate. But his wife stood still, and looked with wide-opened eyes upon that human tempest. She was braver than he; she came of a finer stock; her moral courage steeled her heart to dare the worst the mob might do. She saw the women toss their bare arms skyward, saw the men claw vainly at the air, whilst they foamed at the mouth; but she would not flinch. Perhaps she hoped for release from the life she was living; perhaps, who can tell what such a woman feels when all her finer instincts are soiled by hourly contact with a base-minded man. He had thought to strike terror into her soul, when he took her to that window; but he got a glimpse of a nature too strong for him to tame, and he hated her.

He would have given all he possessed on earth, in that hour, to have been able to put himself at the head of his troop, and ridden in amongst the mob that shamed him; but for him, or the men of his line, there was to be no more taste of power in Moscow. The journey to Svir was devoid of interest,

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though the demeanour of the peasants, in the villages along the route, was different to that of the populace of the city; for the villagers were only able to gather in small numbers, and it is numbers alone that give the mob courage to act. The village folk knew Prince Otto as a man who had wielded unlimited power only a short time before, and, for aught they knew, he might be reinstated again; then woe to the unlucky wretch who had dared to so much as lift an eyebrow in his presence in the day of his humiliation. So they cringed, as serfs will cringe, and did him reverence; but none of the men and women of his own class came near him. He was an alien amongst his own people, and amongst his own kindred. There was only one person upon whom he could visit his distemper, and that one was his wife. He never used a harsh word to her, never put any indignity upon her, in front of his servants; but, when alone with her, he treated her as though she had been something he had hired at a street corner in Paris; and he let her know that she had no wifely place in his heart, no status in his mind. Had he ignored her entirely, had he given her one portion of the grey, grim old castle, and bidden her consider herself a prisoner, she would have been comparatively happy. Had he even struck her, she might have defied him or fled from him; but he kept her near him.

Laughing, his sneering devil of a laugh, in her face, he had once said, "We are alone here, no one will visit us, no one will intrude themselves upon us; I cannot go to any Russian city, and you shall not." Then, with his cold low laugh, he added, "We are alone, Jane, and our life here shall be one perpetual honeymoon."

So the months drifted onward, and her face lost none of its beauty; the old dainty girlish look had

left it for ever before she had been wedded a week, left it never to return; but, in its place, there grew up a white marble beauty. Her golden hair, that her father had loved so well, changed swiftly, until she moved through that old castle crowned with hair as white as hoar-frost; but her blue eyes were as bright as ever, though there was no laughter in them now. Her figure was as slim, and as alert, as of old; once he drew her attention to the snowy whiteness of her hair.

“Are you not happy with me, Jane?” he asked, all his mocking cruelty of disposition dancing in his eyes as he spoke. “Are you wedded to a man so bad, that even your hair has blanched in a few months?”

She looked at him as Mary might have looked at Judas. “I am not wedded to a man at all,” she answered quietly. Then, with a shudder of disgust, “I am, God help me—I am wedded to a satyr!”

That cry of pain, that look of disgust, that shudder, which shook her from head to foot, was a sweet morsel to him; for he was the blackest product of a black-hearted family.

Meanwhile her friends in England knew nothing of all that she suffered. Her father retired more and more from active life, for the stress of those strenuous days aged young men quickly, and killed the old.

Never a week passed but some new terror shook England from coast to coast; no sooner was one clever combination consummated by our statesmen, than it was rendered abortive by the evil genius of the great Napoleon, who daily proved to an astounded world that he was as able in council as in action. In that vast drama, men who were nobody yesterday became princes or generals to-day; whilst others, who were great by inheritance, became

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little more than lacqueys in the twinkling of an eye. In the ever-changing scene few men kept their places long. Even in England, girdled as she was by the sea, men felt the shock of the times, and men who were political factors one day were nobodies the next.

A few, however, kept their places, and amongst the few was Mr. Thornton, whose subtle intelligence was of inestimable value to our country. He had no wish for place or power, no desire to fill the eye of the world; all he desired to do was to serve the nation that had given his kinsfolk an asylum, and had at least provided them with a greater amount of civil rights than any other country upon the face of the earth would permit them to enjoy.

A slave to no particular party, he gave to each in turn the full benefit of his great talents. Seeking for nothing himself, he was sought for by all, and was never found wanting. His knowledge of the real state of affairs all over the world was limitless, for wherever there was a Hebrew community he had friends; and what corner of the globe was there then, or is there now, where the Hebrew does not, and did not exist?

The "Son of the Dust," travelling without purse and without scrip, from far-off Ethiopia, came to him, and laid the pearls of his wisdom, gathered here and there by the wayside, at the feet of Mr. Thornton. That other "Son of the Dust," whose feet had recently tried the highways and the alleys of vast cities, came likewise to him, and told the things he knew. From every corner of the globe the "Sons of the Dust" visited him, and shook from their feet the dust of knowledge which they gathered in their wanderings, and he treasured all, rejecting nothing. And so it came about that of all the wise men of his day and

generation, none had such an inexhaustible fund of knowledge of the world's affairs as the Hebrew, known to London as plain Mr. Thornton. He kept his fingers upon every string, and forsook none who served him faithfully; even the humblest of his servitors found him a never-failing friend in time of trouble. Even the wild night-rider—the man who had once been within an ace of the gallows—learnt to know that the word of a man of character is a thing to be relied upon, in all emergencies; for, as he languished in a French prison, a message was brought to him that Mr. Thornton had, first of all, effected his exchange; and, secondly, had arranged for him to be put over the Prussian border, instead of being returned to England. And, when at last he found himself a free man, in Prussian territory, he was offered a place of some slight importance, with every chance to rise, in a Prussian cavalry regiment. He accepted the offer with joy; for, in England, there could not possibly be a career of any distinction for anyone who had led the life he had led. He took the first opportunity that arrived to write to his benefactor, and thank him for the path he had opened for him; and the only regret he expressed was, that his horse, Grey Gauntlet, could not share his campaigns.

A month or two passed, and he had settled down to his new duties, and was trying his hardest to transfer his affections to a big, brown mare, that had been allotted to him, when one morning the officer in command of his brigade sent for him, to say that a messenger had arrived from London, who desired to see him. So the night-rider—now a Prussian sergeant of cavalry—made his way quickly to the rendezvous indicated by the officer, and, to his unbounded astonishment, saw Vittles, who had long since been

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promoted to the post of special messenger to Mr. Thornton.

Vittles had changed his clothes, and his station, but the dialect of St. Giles he could not forsake. The sight of the shrewd, honest, humorous Cockney face was a delight to the night-rider.

"Why, my lad," said he, "I think I have never seen you without pleasure, but never with more pleasure than now. Come and let me crack a bottle of good Rhine wine with you."

"Beg pardin', sir, but, hif you don't mind, sir, make it a bottle o' good beer, sir. This vine may be all very vell for Frenchmen and Dutchmen, but a drop o' malt for me, sir; this vine sets my belly grumblin' from morning till night, sir."

The smart sergeant, who knew the London prejudice in favour of malt liquor, clapped his man on the back, with a hearty laugh. "A drop o' good malt is the hardest thing to find in Prussia, my lad; but, if it's to be got in the town you shall have it, for I see you don't take kindly to foreign parts, or foreign ways."

"Can't say as Hi do, sir," answered Vittles. "Don't vonder old Boneyparte wants to get out of this part o' the world." Then, shaking his head sadly, he dropped into Peter Brown's favourite phrasing, "Some folks talk o' 'eaven and 'ell, sir, but gimme ole Hingland."

"You have brought me a message from Mr. Thornton, I suppose, Vittles," said the sergeant, as he drew the cork from a long-necked bottle.

"Vell, not hexactly a message, sir."

"A letter, perhaps?"

"Not that hexactly either, sir; but hif you'll come as far as the stable"—

A startled look sprang into the night-rider's eyes. Then, without a word, he vaulted over the table,

dashed through the door, and was across the yard, and into the stable, before his surprised countryman could finish his sentence.

When Vittles sauntered to the stable door, he beheld a strange sight. A beautiful grey horse, with a fierce, rolling eye, with ears laid back, and neck arched, was doing its very best to kick the side out of the stable; while the night-rider, half-laughing, half-crying, and more or less insane with joy, was dancing about in the straw; now gripping the velvet muzzle in his two strong hands, and kissing it; anon capering down the stall, and digging his thumbs teasingly into the heaving grey flanks; at intervals uttering queer horsy cries, that the grey seemed to understand; for, though it kicked and bit with tremendous force, it never once allowed teeth or heels to touch the man.

"Ah," murmured Vittles, as he leant against the doorpost; "now I know v'ot the duchess meant v'en she said, 'No, don't take 'm any message from me; v'en a man gives 'is 'eart to an 'orse, 'e only 'as cold comfort for a voman.'"

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. SAXON

THAT night was one which Vittles, at all events, never forgot. The night-rider, who stood very high in the estimation of his superior officer, easily obtained permission to spend a night with his friend from England, and, having invited a couple of cronies—non-commissioned officers, who had fought up and down the Rhine off and on for the past dozen years—he took possession of the room in the old-world *auberge*, which looked into the stable-yard, for he could not bear to be far away from Grey Gauntlet. The room was plenty large enough for a cosy party, and not large enough for the cronies to lose one another in. Plaster had been broken from the walls in places, the red brick showing beneath like pomegranate pips through sun-stained rind. Here and there the walls showed black with smoke; in other places the heel-taps from wine-glasses left pale, reddish splashes and streaks along the plaster, which had been white once in some far-off time. A square table, black with age, stood in the middle of the room, as guiltless of cloth or cover as the floor was of carpet. A merry little fire burned joyously in the broken grate. A clock, with only one hand, ticked wheezingly upon the mantelpiece, flanked upon each side by a rusty sabre. Four or five rude pictures, painted by local

artists—probably in lieu of payment for Rhine wine—hung from the walls, whilst half a dozen stools and one chair were dotted about the floor, where the sand lay an inch deep. A good many soldiers of a great many armies had caroused in that same room, since it was first opened; but surely four merrier men never sat down to broach bottle or carve poultry than those two English and two Prussians, who sat and smoked and sang and talked until cock-crow.

Before anything else was attended to, the one-time highwayman had dragged his two military friends out to the stables, to see the horse they had heard so much about. Often they had listened, with their tongues in their cheeks, whilst the Englishman told of the grey beauty he had left in London. They had winked at each other over the edges of their flagons, whilst he told of terrific leaps over hedges and ditches, walls and barred gates; they had turned their faces away from the light of the camp fire, that he might not see their incredulous smiles, whilst he told of marvellous gallops over English downs, and flying journeys from county to county. They had swallowed his stories with a pinch of salt, because, being old campaigners, they were not averse to drawing the long-bow themselves. Sometimes, when they had eaten a good supper, and the wine near their elbows was good, and they sat back with their belts unbuckled, they could do some very fair story-telling themselves; but none of them ever quite managed to rival Grey Gauntlet's deeds. So that, when it happened that he told them that he had the horse he had so often spoken about in the stables of the *auberge* where they sat, they were as keen to see the horse, as he was to show the animal. Tall, long-limbed, hardy handsome fellows were those two Prussians; men of granite, who could ride and fight and sleep in snow

or slush; rather too free with their lips, where either a lass or a bottle were concerned; but, in all other respects, grand fellows to have as one's friends. When they saw the long, low body of Grey Gauntlet, the game-cock head, the sloping shoulders, the long rein, the legs like slender pillars of steel, the straight back, the round barrel, the great quarters, the full nostrils, and the round rolling eye, they were as free with their praise as even the grey's master could desire.

"Ah," cried Rudolph Heinman, pulling at his long brown moustache; "ah, if I had a horse like that, I should never know a moment's peace whilst I was camped within two leagues of old Blucher."

"Nor I either," echoed his countryman. "Ach! but I should fear to sleep, and fear to ride; for if Blucher sees this horse, comrade, he will have him."

"It's one thing to take him, it's another to ride him, and I don't think 'Old Vorwarts' would keep him long if he took him," chuckled the Englishman. But, all the same, he made up his mind to keep Grey Gauntlet out of the Marshal's sight if possible.

After the visit to the stable came supper, and to Vittles, used as he was to civilian ways and methods, this supper seemed a dream of unbridled bliss, and more than once he felt tempted to bid farewell to peaceful ways, and take to the sword for a living; but the memory of a boyhood passed in the slush of a city in winter froze his ardour. He had tasted all the wretchedness of campaigning, without any of its allurements, in the battle for bread; and the memory never, in his most exalted moments, quite forsook him. He saw a fine old cock turkey, that had strutted the yard defiantly that very evening,

come on to the table, roasted brown, and stuffed with sage and chopped onions—a feast for a king, if the king only had a commoner's appetite; a pair of fowls, boiled until they were as tender as pullets; a rib or two of pork, and roast potatoes, with wine and beer to wash it down. Corporal Heinman carved the turkey, whilst Sergeant Schoman laid the fowls in fragments, Vittles attended to the potatoes, and the night-rider drew corks and filled flagons. Scant ceremony was wasted by any of them; they ate and they drank, making a prodigious clatter, the two Prussians every few moments shouting in stentorian tones for one or other of the landlord's jolly-looking daughters to do this or get that for the Englishmen; for it was in their minds to do the honours of the country in a way to make the supper linger as a fragrant memory in the minds of the travellers. And in this they succeeded, Vittles' only regret being that he feared that none whom he knew would believe one tithe of his story when he came to tell it in some London tavern; for, since his promotion to regular service, Vittles had taken to spending a spare hour or two of an evening at the Miller's Daughter's Tavern, in company with a few other serving-men of decent repute. The supper came to an end at last, and the three soldiers leant back in their seats, unbuckling their belts to give digestion fair play; they rested their backs against the wall, and stretched out their long legs, and called for pipes and tobacco; and Vittles following suit, with loosened cravat and waistcoat unbuttoned all the way from waist to chin, the time passed merrily. The Prussians toasted the King of England; the Englishmen, not backward in such courtesies, toasted the King of Prussia. Then, one of the Prussians proposed long life and happiness to Nelson, and Vittles gave them

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Marshal Blucher's health. Then came the singing of songs, which was Vittles' one great accomplishment. Where he got that rich, round, mellow voice, with the laughter and the sunshine running through it all the time, Providence alone knows; it was a gift from the gods to a waif in the slums. When Vittles sang, the landlord's daughters came to the door, and pushed their pretty faces into the room; they did not understand a word he sang, yet they smiled and beat time with their hands; and when he sang how the miller's buxom daughter winked at the farmer out in the lane, suiting a droop of his own roguish eyelid to the words, they clapped their hands delightedly, and clamoured loudly for more. The two Prussians sang, the one of love, the other of wine; and the ex-night-rider trolled a gay ditty, which ran and rippled, and rose and fell, like the clatter of horse hoofs on a well-set road.

But duty called the two Prussians away at last, and they left with many a hearty hand-grip and good wish for the future. Then, as sleep was far from their eyes, the pair of Britons sat down to talk of London.

"Tell me what has become of the lass we called the duchess? Is your heart set on her yet, lad?"

And Vittles had replied, "Vell, now, the duchess is a beautiful voman; but she's like the veather, she changes too much. One day it's 'Vittles, 'ow are you,' vith a smile; the next day it's 'Vittles,' vith a nod, an' scarcely that; the next it's a cold shoulder, vith her 'ead in the hair, and another beau on her arm; and the very next day a smile an' a flower fer yer button-hole."

"Ah, Vittles, my boy, you should play your fish; not try to land it directly it's hooked."

"Bless your 'eart, sir, that's w'ot I does; but hif

I melt vith love, she pushes me away vith a mop; if I play 'er 'aughty, she laughs, and gets another beau."

"What has become of our friend, Saxon?"

A joyous laugh ran all round the shrewd weather-worn face of the Londoner. "Don't you vorry abart 'im, sir; 'e's gettin' all 'e deserved, and a little bit over, Hi'm thinking."

"Landed in Newgate, I suppose?"

"Hexactly w'ot 'e aint done, sir. Some people, sir, goes to market to buy cow-heels, an' bring 'ome sheep's trotters; that's w'ot Mr. Saxon's done, sir. Went to the river to steal a sloop-o'-war, an' got a 'idin' from a bumboat woman."

The ex-night-rider smiled indulgently, and let the London lad have his head; he knew it was the wisest policy.

"Did you 'ear of the Yorkshire man who brought 'is bulldog to London, sir, to match 'im to throw any bull in Smithfield market, sir?"

"No."

"Vell, 'e did; an' a ton of Yorkshire money to back him. As 'e crossed the 'ay-market vith his terrible dog, 'e met a old fishwife vith a goat pullin' a barrer; an' the Yorkshire man's dog slipped off the leash, an' made a grab at the goat. But the goat 'ad been there before, he just up's on 'is 'ind legs, an' butts the dog into the gutter; an ven 'e tries again, 'e butts 'im back again; an' 'e kep' on buttin' an' buttin' till that fightin' dog climbed up in the goat-cart to get out o' danger; an' then 'e began to bark, an' hevery time 'e barked, the old goat got up on his 'ind legs an' butted at the bark."

"How does this touch our friend, Saxon? I don't quite see where it joins issue, Vittles."

“Vy, sir, hafter you left, Mr. Saxon only came 'ome once, and then he disappeared, an' ve thought it vos good-bye to 'im, an' a good riddance, too; but 'e turned up again. 'E vent to Billingsgate, an' made hout 'e vos a fine gentleman vith a fortin', seein' the sights, an' he fell in love vith the vidder of Peter Twopenny, the fish-dealer, leastvays 'e told 'er 'e did; an' the Twopenny vidder, thinking she'd caught a good-sized fish, vent to church vith 'im; but in two days she found she 'ad landed a 'errin', and a precious small 'errin', too; because 'e wanted to get money out of 'er. So she 'unted round and found hout a lot of Mr. Saxon's life, a lot 'e'd like to forget; so she jest gave him one chance to rise in life—she gave him a barrer in the fish-market; an' she said, 'Now, my precious fine gennelman, you can vork here, or go to Noogate.' 'E said the smell o' fish made him sick, but she said the sight of 'im made 'er sick too; but she meant to put hup vith it, an' so must he, or try a change of hair inside four walls. She von't even let 'im sleep in 'er room," added Vittles, with a joyous chuckle; "'e 'as to sleep in the attick, an' go out every day before dawn vith 'is barrer. Me and the duchess used to patronise 'im," he continued, gleefully; "we used ter go down most hevery day an' buy a 'addick, till one day 'e began to whimper, an' the duchess threw 'er 'addick back at 'im, crying at the top of 'er voice, 'A nice salesman you'll ever make, my gay cockerell; you sold a good man once to the runners, and got nothing out of it yourself; now you've tried to sell a fishwife, and this is what you've come to.' Then 'is wife came bridling up, an' called the duchess by a name they use in the fish-markets. 'I may be all that,' answered she, picking up her skirts with her fingers, and holding her arms away from 'er sides, whilst she tilted

her nose—'all that, an' worse, you twopenny bargain; but I'd rather be *that* than wife to a runner's tout.' And at that all the shrews in the fish-market stood around, and pelted our Mr. Saxon with fish-heads and garbage; for amongst the fishwives a runner has few friends, but a runner's tout has none."

CHAPTER XXVII

A SWORD OF FRANCE

IT was in the beginning of May 1812, and the mutterings of war between Russia and France had deepened into unmistakable growls. Bonaparte had long cherished an idea of humiliating the Muscovite by marching an army across Russia into the Russian capital. He believed—or, at all events, he professed to believe—that the Russians had intrigued with England to baulk him in his schemes, and it was his determination to dictate terms to the Czar, in his own capital, surrounded by French bayonets,—just as he had dictated terms to nearly half the sovereigns of Europe. It was even rumoured that he intended to keep a French army permanently in Russia, and to put his brother Joseph on the Russian throne, and give Joseph's crown to one of his generals. All kinds of wild things were going the rounds of society the wide world over. He was to unite the whole of the continent of Europe under the French flag, and make a war of invasion upon England his next grand *coup*, when, having taken England, he was to cause himself to be crowned in London, Emperor of the World. Wild as the scheme may seem to-day, there were plenty of sober-minded men living in 1812 who thought that Bonaparte would surely try and carry it into effect. At last came the declaration of war

between Russia and France, Bonaparte's first fatal step on the high road to ruin. At that period, Mr. Thornton was making gigantic efforts to keep the rulers of England in touch with the real state of affairs all over the world. He told, in emphatic terms, how hollow the enthusiasm of the Spanish people was, even when British agents, sent out for the purpose, reported that Spain would rise to a man on the approach of a British army destined to free them from Bonaparte's shadow; and for a long time he kept Britain from making that ghastly mistake which she afterwards made, which led to the senseless march into Spain, and subsequent retreat, with the useless, but glorious, battle of Corunna, and death of Sir John Moore. No man living worked harder, or risked more, than Mr. Thornton for England at this period. At one time or another this whole-souled Hebrew, labouring for a land he loved, appeared first in one capital then in another, feeling the pulse of his patients. At last he made his way, in one of his innumerable disguises, to Paris, though he knew well that if he fell into the hands of the French, he would go to the guillotine, without hope of mercy. But, great as the risk was, he had a mission to perform that was worthy of the danger. In the French army there was a brilliant cavalry general named Regnier, who had risen by his own unaided talents from the ranks, until he became one of the finest cavalry leaders in all Europe. Bonaparte often singled him out for special service, on account of his swiftness of movement, his adroitness in avoiding actual conflict with crushing forces of the enemy, and the splendour of his courage in the charge. Even Murat and Ney, those giants of the cavalry arm, spoke of him with respectful admiration, and prophesied great things for him. Now,

though ostensibly a Frenchman, and in all things loyal and true to France, Regnier was in reality a Jew, whose parents had fled from Prussia at a time of fanatical persecution, and taken up their abode in Paris, where they had been well received and fairly treated. Forced into the French army, at an early age, young Regnier had thrown himself heart and soul into his profession, and by his ceaseless attention to detail, and by his courage and resource, had won his way from the ranks to an honourable position, when he had the good fortune to attract the attention of Bonaparte, whose eagle glance never missed a good general, even though he wore a subaltern's uniform. It was to General Regnier that Mr. Thornton went, just before the French officer was ordered to go with his division into Russia.

As "a Son of the Dust," the great English Jew obtained entrance to the private apartments of the general, and at once made himself known in his true character. The French Jew sprang to his feet, his moustache bristling with indignation. "Mr. Gotschalk," said he, fiercely, using the old name, "Mr. Gotschalk, this is an infamy; you have come to me as a Hebrew, and your country and mine are enemies. I would have you understand that I am a true Frenchman, as well as a Jew, and if you are not out of Paris within three hours from now, I will myself arrest you, and hand you over to the proper authorities as a spy."

"It was because I knew you were a Frenchman and a man of honour, as well as a Jew, General, that I came to you. I shall be out of Paris, on my way back to London, within an hour from now; and, what is more, I pledge you my word of honour that nothing that I have heard or seen, or may hear and see, in France, shall be used by me to the

detriment of France. Will you accept my pledge General?"

"Yes, monsieur, for your word is known to be inviolate from one end of Europe to the other. But why do you come here; why this terrible risk to yourself and to me?"

"If you will resume your chair, I will tell you, General; and, in doing so, I must tell you my history, and the history of my family for several generations."

The general resumed his seat, and drew a chair for his uninvited guest.

"In Russia, not far from the banks of the River Tvir, there is a little village called Svir; it stands on the edge of the great forest of Sukona. Just beyond the village lies the stone Castle of Otto, Prince of Svir, one time Russian plenipotentiary at the Court of St. James."

"The village of Svir, monsieur; why, it is marked upon my line of route."

"I know it, General."

"Ah, you say that, monsieur! How do you know my line of march?"

Mr. Thornton waved his hand. "Let that pass, General; I did not come to discuss statecraft; if I had not known it, I should not have come to you. Now, listen, for I have a tale to tell which will appeal to you as a Jew, for you come of a stock that has suffered."

The general gritted his teeth. "Yes, that is so; and some day, when a certain Prussian town lies in my line of route, I will teach a Prussian junker that my mother's sister's honour has got to be avenged."

"It will come," answered Mr. Thornton, "sooner or later. You will demand an eye for an eye; or, if you do not live to do it, one of your name will; for

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we are the chosen people, General. There is a power behind us these new nations know nothing of, and 'The Watcher on the tower never slumbers.'"

So, in low impassioned tones, the English Jew told to the Frenchman the whole story of the life in Svir—of the generations of outrage and robbery, persecution, and wrong. He told of the murder of old Eli, and the march through the woods. He spoke of the farewell yells of the villagers, and the welcoming howl of the gaunt grey wolves, of the famine and the cold, the marching and the fighting, the deaths and the births. He told of the rescue by the English noble, and the life that followed in England, even down to the marriage of the Lady Jane to Otto, Prince of Svir. And when he had done, when his stern lips had closed upon the last passage, he looked straight into the officer's face, but said no other word, neither good nor bad.

Nor was there need of words. The general rose quietly from his chair, and drew his sword, holding the hilt in one hand, the point in the other. "I thank you, monsieur, for telling me your story. I thank the God of Israel, too, that the men of Svir, and Otto, their prince, are the foes of France; and, most of all, I thank the Emperor for putting the village of Svir on my line of route. If I live to draw my chasseurs round Svir, the clank of our sabres and the tread of our horses' feet will be a worse sound for their ears than the howling of wolves. As for Otto of Svir, for the murders he himself has worked upon our people, I will hang him from his own tower before I fire his castle." He ceased speaking, and, bending his head, solemnly kissed the blue steel of his sabre midway between his hands, then sent it clashing back into its scabbard.

"There is just one other thing, General, which I

should like to mention before I go," said Mr. Thornton.

The general bowed.

If the fortune of war gives Otto, Prince of Svir, into your hands, General, may I plead for your care of the princess, his wife; she, being an English-woman, is an enemy of France. She married her lord to upset French plans, but"—

"But—'she is a woman,' you would say, monsieur. I will charge my officers—ay, and my men, too—that no indignity is offered to the princess; she shall have all the protection and all the courtesy due to a lady of rank and gentle breeding."

Mr. Thornton held out his hand.

"No," said the general kindly, but firmly, "as a Jew, I will not forget what is due from a Jew to the foes of our people, but beyond that, monsieur, I cannot go. You are an enemy to France, and in everything, except religion, I am a Frenchman. If at any time, monsieur, peace is established between England and France, I will be proud to put my hand between yours, for such men as you make one feel proud of being a Hebrew."

"So let it be," replied Mr. Thornton sadly. "In the fields of diplomacy, I have tried to make the Hebrew race respected. In the fields of war, who is a brighter ornament than General Regnier—the mantle of Joshua has fallen upon worthy shoulders."

The Frenchman bowed low. "And the mantle of Solomon has no unworthy resting-place, monsieur. We part in sadness, but not in bitterness. Some day we may meet, when the world is at peace."

"It will be in London," said the soldier, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Not so, General; wipe that dream from your mind; it will be in Paris."

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And in Paris it was that they met, after the Allies had shattered the haughty Corsican's power, and taken the capital of France at the bayonet's point. But that was in a far-off day. Much had to be done before those two fine men could clasp hands as men and brothers.

CHAPTER XXVIII

I MUST SEE JANE

ON the 9th of May 1812 Bonaparte set out from St. Cloud, moving, as he always moved, like a human whirlwind. He crossed the Rhine on the 13th of the same month, and the Elbe on the 29th. On the 16th of the following month he was over the Vistula, swooping as an eagle swoops, and making his footing secure, whilst the Russians were quarrelling amongst themselves as to the best means of checking his progress. He was over the Nieman before they could offer him any resistance that counted in the game of war, and on the 14th of September he was in Moscow. At that moment he was upon the very pinnacle of his power; and his fall was to be more sudden than his dazzling rise to greatness, though no human being could have foretold it that September day. But with that strange creature of destiny we have but little to do here. He comes into our story because we could not touch the times in which he lived without feeling his influence. But our duty at present lies in London, where old Lord Charles Fiveash lay dying. The fine old man, whose every waking thought had been for his country and his country's good, was falling quietly to the grave, worn out with the work the nation demanded at his hands. He had reaped nothing from his life of toil—no

titles, no estates, no place or emolument for himself or his near friends. His public life had been blameless. He had been consulted a hundred times in regard to honours to be conferred upon others, and a hint of his willingness to accept it would have brought him a title that would have placed him very near the foot of the throne. But he stood above such things; with him love of country was the lever of his life. He could not understand a man seeking payment in any shape or form for such service. Place-hunters never tried to make use of him as a medium for the accomplishment of their desires. Had they done so he would have treated them as he would have treated a groom guilty of an impertinence. He was drifting at last over the boundary line, into the territory where diplomacy is of no avail; and the few friends who pressed around him, as the shadows fell, knew that his life's work was ended—knew that, as far as England was concerned, he was already dead. His son had taken up the lines, one by one, as they fell from the old man's fingers; for, since the hour his sister had revealed Constance Stanleigh's real character to him, young Charles Fiveash had closed his account with the world of frivolity, and had settled down to the task of statecraft. He had loved that woman as few men of his age do love anything except themselves, and the knowledge of her worthlessness had shaken him to the core.

"You might marry, Charles," the old man had said to him, half querulously, upon one occasion. "There are several good reasons why you should. A diplomat has a better standing as a married man. And then there is the family name to perpetuate; don't wait until you are old; an old man's child is generally a rickety creature—rickety in head, heart, and limb. We go the pace too much to hope to

wear well. A green old age don't follow a gay youth."

"I shall marry for the sake of the name some day, sir, but not just at present; but if I see a chance of a wise diplomatic alliance I shall not fail to make it."

The old diplomat looked keenly at his son. "The diplomatic marriages don't always turn out just what we wish, Charles. I am afraid we sacrificed our little Jane to no purpose. Better look out for some plain healthy girl, who will give you robust children, my boy; we Fiveashes are running a little too much to mere brain, I'm afraid; and brain without body to back it, and carry it through, is of little use; and"—he paused, and laughed a little nervous laugh—"perhaps I'm getting into my dotage, boy, but at times, of late, I've fancied I'd like to see a grandchild of my own running about the old place, and hear once more the sound of childish voices—quite a dotard's weakness, I know, but so it is."

"Very well, sir," was the calm reply, "I'll do anything I can to please you; the first clean-minded gentlewoman I meet, who will take sufficient interest in me to have me, shall be my wife. I have no particular choice in regard to appearances."

"Good God, man!" cried his father, in a burst of rage, "have you no feelings at all? Why, old as I am, I could rake up more sentiment than that! Marry a country girl—the very best thing you can do. 'Fore gad! you are an automaton; marry a lusty, loving, buxom lass from the shires, who will put a little warmth into the blood of the next generation of Fiveashes."

Then Charles went over to his father's side. "Look here, sir; perhaps I'm not as callous or as cold as you take me to be—but I'll tell you something, because it seems to me you ought to know, for many

reasons." Then, in the shady, dark-panelled old library, standing behind his father's chair, he told him of his love for Constance Stanleigh, and her unworthiness.

When he had finished his recital, the old man reached his hand round, and gripped his son's hand. "A bad hit, a bad hit, Charlie," he said, his voice shaking painfully. I wonder where she got that vicious strain from. I have known her family all my life, and her old uncle was my dearest friend. She is a dangerous woman, Charlie; she is a dangerous woman, and must be put where she can work no more mischief. You should have told me this at once; a man who treads the path of diplomacy must have no heart, he must be all head, my son."

A couple of evenings later Constance Stanleigh was surprised to find herself greeted by the old lord, who slipped her arm through his, and drew her away to a quiet corner, just vacated by some card-players.

"You are looking very well, my lord," she ventured.

"Am I, my dear; well, I regret to say that I cannot return you the compliment. It was on the subject of your health that I wished to speak to you; you are ill, anyone can see you are ill."

She protested that she had never felt better in her life.

"Tut, tut, my dear!" he cried, in his suave voice, "permit me the use of my eyes. You are ill, so ill that you must leave London and at once. There is nothing for your complaint but country air and a quiet life, free from all communication with the busy world, my dear child; and you must allow me, as an old friend of yours and your family, to say that you must leave London by to-morrow at noon. I have a little place, quite a little place, on the borders of

Scotland, which is at your disposal; in fact, I have sent a man on to see that it is prepared for you. You will take your own woman, of course."

"I don't follow you, my lord. I—I—what does it mean?"

"Tut, tut, child, why fence with words. Shall we—er—call it diplomacy? I'm told you are fond of diplomacy, so let us call it that, and say no more on the subject."

"And if I refuse to go," she said, in a half-defiant whisper. But her face was white as death, and her eyes were starting from her head; for she knew the game was going all against her.

"You are looking really ill, almost distraught, my dear—don't make yourself worse than you are; you really *must* start for the country to-morrow at noon, or your uncle's physician, who is a madman himself on brain disease, may—nay, I am *certain* he will—have you placed in Bedlam. Excuse me, if I have broken the news of your ill-health to you too suddenly; believe me, I should have taken this step before, had I known of your"—he paused—"your disease, my dear."

So the next week found this woman, who had prided herself upon being a power in the land, a prisoner at large in a dreary, mountainous, little hamlet, where she saw none but ignorant clods; for no people of quality lived within a day's ride of her. A worse fate for a woman of her temperament no human soul could imagine. The folk were poor, uneducated boors, coarse and common even in their loves and hates. They came into the world and went out again, without achieving anything more beneficial to the world than the progeny of the cattle they tended from day to day. And into this society the brilliant woman of society was thrown in the

heyday of her youth; and she knew that in that miserable hamlet she would have to drag out her life to the very end, forgotten by all who had known her, except the inexorable few whose interest it was to bury her alive. She had chosen the crooked path, and her feet had gone astray, as the feet of men and women always do go astray, sooner or later, who diverge wilfully from the right road. And her punishment remained with her, for she never escaped from it; but lived on to a miserable old age, too proud even to speak to a woman, or even a little child, belonging to the hamlet, and none other ever came near her. She reaped that which she had sown.

But we are wandering from the deathbed of Lord Charles, whose life was drawing to a close in the middle of 1812. His mind, worn out by incessant thinking and planning, wandered at times; but always he asked for one person—his daughter Jane.

“If it were not for this Franco-Russian war,” said his son Charles to Mr. Thornton, “I should send to Russia, and try and induce Jane to come home; she would bring peace to his last hours.”

“I should try and get the princess to England at once, were I in your place,” answered Mr. Thornton. “Svir is a lonely place, and in war time the peasantry are often as formidable as the enemy to the nobility, especially if the nobles have behaved badly in time of peace, and Otto, the prince, has not been renowned for his kindness to the poor.”

“I cannot go myself, and you cannot be spared from London now, not for an hour, Mr. Thornton. Who else is there whom we could send?”

“I only know one man.”

“Who is that?”

“Your cousin, George.”

"There are reasons why he cannot be asked," began the young man stiffly.

"I know those reasons," was the tart answer, "and, knowing them, I say, ask him to go."

"But, sir, if you know my reason for not asking my cousin George, you will surely see that he is impossible for such a task."

"I will admit the impossibility when you prove to me that your cousin is a scoundrel, or your sister an immodest woman; not until then."

"He was in love with her before her marriage, and a burnt stick soon lights."

"Who elected you to play the part of Providence to your sister sir?" was the caustic retort. "Your sister will be save in the sailor's hands, and there are reasons, concerning which you know nothing, why your sister should not be in the Castle of Svir when the French troops arrive there. You cannot go, because you fill your father's place; I cannot leave England, because, if you will permit me to do so, I will be to you what I was to him. The only man who can go to Svir, and do what wants doing, is your cousin George, an old-time lover of hers, you say. I know that, and I know that she loved him; but they are both English, and both of gentle blood, and that is sufficient guarantee of fidelity to honour's laws; and I will tell you that she will need a lover to go in search of her and bring her safely out of danger, for the Russian peasantry will be as dangerous as mad wolves when the French have destroyed all their winter stores. The Englishman who can win his way to Svir, with the Russians watching him upon one side and the French upon the other, will be a fortunate man."

"I would go myself, if I could get away," began Charles.

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But the older man cut him short. "Tush, young sir, in your own sphere you are worth any man your age in England; but in a quest of this kind your sailor cousin will be worth a round dozen of you. His profession has taught him to act and think at the same time; yours has taught you to think first and think swiftly, but to act slowly. Fortunately for us, his ship is even now in harbour, and, what is more, I know that a British gunboat is to make a run from here, and got as far up the river Tvir as possible. He can go by that, and land where his wits tell him to land, and then do his best for his cousin."

"Very well, sir," said Charles briskly; "if it is as you say, let it be done as you suggest, though I do not doubt my cousin will win through in safety. These sailors seem to go anywhere and do anything that no soldier or civilian can do; the fortune of the seas seems to stay with them at all times."

"Say rather that the training of the seas makes men ready for all emergencies. Seamen act, while landsmen are thinking whether it would be wise to act or to remain quiescent; but let us to business. You will intimate to your cousin that you, as the present head of the family, wish him to go to Svir and bring the princess back with him to her father's deathbed. I will then aid him with all the means in my power to make his mission a success."

CHAPTER XXIX

FOR LOVE AND DUTY

A BRITISH gunboat was crawling slowly up the Tvir, the warship had almost reached that point where the Tvir ceases to be navigable for anything except very small craft. Three men were leaning over her bows, talking earnestly. One, a thick-set, elderly sea-dog, the commander of the gunboat, says, "So you have fully made up your mind to land at Minck, George?"

"Yes," said the man addressed. "It's my best chance, I think."

"A slender chance, George, a slender chance; devil take it, man, I don't like this job at all. If you fall into the hands of the French, they will surely shoot you, believing you to be a spy; small blame to 'em," he added, "I'd do the same myself, under the circumstances. If, on the other hand, the Russians get hold of you, and find out that you are not a Russian, they will show you scant mercy. I don't mean the Russian army, or people of that kind, George, but the common crowd with whom you are likely to come into conflict. They are ignorant, superstitious, and brutal; I have fought against them, and know them pretty well; every man who is not a Russian born, will be an object of hate to them now; so, for God's sake, be careful!"

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The third man, who, up to that time, had not spoken, now broke in.

"I don't know a very great deal about the Russians, Mr. Fiveash, but I do know a lot concerning Bonaparte, for I've served as a volunteer physician in half a dozen armies that have fought against him, and I tell you not to be led astray by the glowing stories you may have heard about him. He is the most inhuman man of our day and generation; if you fall into his hands, and fail to convince him that you are in Russia engaged upon a purely private enterprise, he will hand you over to a firing-party with less compunction than he would hand over a dog. Do not count upon his chivalry, for he possesses none; I was at Jaffa, and I know what I am talking about. A leader who would ruthlessly poison his own wounded soldiers, because they hindered his operations, is not the man to study your life."

"I understand my position clearly," answered the man addressed. "If I fall in with the French, I am a Frenchman for the time being; if I cannot satisfy them of that, I shall be shot as a spy. If, on the other hand, the Russians, with whom I shall have to come in contact, suspect me of being anything other than a Russian, I shall, in all human probability, be stoned or beaten to death. It's rather fortunate for me," he added, with a smile, "that for years I was engaged on ships that did little else but blockade French ports, and, for many reasons, had to learn to talk French like a native; and also that my gunboat duty took me for a year at a time in Russian rivers, or at the mouth of Russian harbours. The linguistic gift is about the only trait that marks me as a Fiveash; you know the family is famous for its gift of tongues."

"You will need all the Fiveash gifts to pull you through this mess, George; I can't take you further

than Minck, and I can't wait a moment after landing you; I must cut and run in the darkness, for the French are close upon the river now, and I don't want them to sink my boat. I had orders to use all secrecy and despatch, and not get into an entanglement."

"Right you are, sir," was the cheery reply. "Drop me ashore where you like, and I will take my chance."

A little while later a bluff lieutenant stepped to the commander's side. "Beg your pardon, sir, boat's ready for the shore."

"Very well, Mr. Widderbourne. God send you back to us safe and sound, George! we want you in the navy, remember."

Then the two old comrades of the sea clasped hands with that big grip which sailors love, and the commander whispered, "Got the pair of pistols I gave you nice and handy? hair-trigger, mind, and as sure as death up to thirty paces; arguments a good thing, George, but a bit of lead nicely placed ain't to be despised when it comes to a pinch. Good-bye, and good fortune."

Two hours later the sailor was splashing his way on foot into the village of Minck, on the banks of the Tvir, bending his head to the storm, for the wind was bringing the rain along in a cloud, and he had to face it and make headway against it. He meant to make Minck his starting-point, for the village of Svir was only fifteen miles in front of him; but every step was a death-trap. As he splashed heavily through the rain and mud his thoughts went back over the old ground, and he saw his cousin once again, as he had seen her the day she left England, lying white-faced and terror-stricken in the arms of her husband. He thought of the despair, the fear, the horror on the dear

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white face, and his throat filled so that he could scarcely breathe.

"She loved me," he thought, "I'll swear she loved me; I read it in her face that day when her eyes met mine; and I wish by all that is sacred that I could fight for the French this night; I'd give my soul to get close to Otto of Svir, cutlass in hand, for she feared him and hated him, though God only knows why she married him. These great families have secrets which no one knows, and no one can know; and I suppose old Lord Charles felt on his deathbed that he had to see the girl he had sacrificed, to tell her why he did it, perhaps."

He thought of his own danger too, as he plodded along, but the danger did not trouble him overmuch. He had entered the navy as a child, and, ever since he had been on board ship, England had been fighting someone, and his whole life had been passed amidst scenes of peril. Every tar who served under him was great, as far as personal courage can make a man great; and he was great himself in many ways; he had all the Fiveash pride of race, only he was a doer of deeds.

He had risked his gallant life for England more times than he had hairs in his head, and he never gave that a thought,—all that he did, he did out of pure love for his country and his profession. Not that there was anything very wonderful about that, for thousands of sailors did it before him, and are doing it to-day, for they were then, and they are now, the glory of the British race.

He was not troubling his head much about danger as he faced the biting wind and the driving rain; all his trouble was for the woman he had loved from childhood, and loved even yet, though she was another man's wife. But his love was purified by the sea; it

was not merely a love of sense, a mere passionate appeal to nature. It was the love of a man who would save a woman from danger, and, if needs be, hand her over in safety to another man who was not worthy of her, but who owned her by right of marriage. What he would have given to have felt her arms clinging around his neck, to have felt her lips pressed hot against his own, only he and his Creator knew! But above and beyond and over all was his simple loyal love for a woman he knew to be good and pure. His walk that night would have been dismal enough under any circumstances; the rain fell without ceasing; the wind had a weird sound in it as it crossed the river and sobbed and sighed amidst the marshy sedge that lined the low banks. But his thoughts were sad, and the heart of a man will sink amidst such surroundings, and George Fiveash's heart was heavy enough when at last he reached Minck. Here and there a light shone through the chinks of the shutters that guarded the windows of the dwellings; the major part of the hamlet was wrapped in darkness; dogs rushed out of the darkness, and snarled and snapped at his heels; but he went steadily on, until the red glow in the window of a low, forbidding-looking dwelling warned him that the place he sought was in front of him—a foul vodka-shop which did duty for an inn. He knew the place, for he had been in Minck several times before in other days, with a boat's crew of well-armed reckless British tars at his heels.

He knew that inside that den he would only come in contact with the most desperate and debased kind of people that the neighbourhood owned, yet he had no choice. He must go in, and take his chance; and the best chance lay in boldness, as it so often does. Lifting the uncouth latch, made of an iron bar, which had to be jerked upwards by pulling a loop of raw

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hide, he pushed open the door, and, stepping in, slammed the door behind him, using some force to do it, for the wind was blowing full in the doorway. For just one moment he stood with his back to the door, whilst he took in the scene he had to face. The room was long, low, narrow, and dark; a single lamp, suspended from a hook in the middle of the ceiling, was the only light in the place, except a big log fire which blazed in the far end of the room. A long, dirty, narrow table ran nearly the whole length of the room, and at this sat some half-dozen men of the peasant class drinking vodka, for the most part, though one or two of them had their arms sprawled upon the table and their heads buried in their arms. Another group sat around the fire; some were villagers, some were boatmen, others were travellers—but none of them looked sociable or inviting. The sailor made his way rather noisily, like a man who rather courted than avoided recognition, right up to the fire; and pushing through the circle with scant ceremony, called gruffly for liquor, which was brought to him by a middle-aged woman, who looked about as inviting as her surroundings. He took the dram, and tossed it down his throat like a true Russian of the lower class, and called for more. A landsman might have found this a difficult task, but a man-of-war officer of the old *régime* drank liquor very little superior to vodka, and so our adventurer found this part of his enterprise easy enough of accomplishment. The company gave him rude stares, but none vouchsafed him a word; for the country was in such an unsettled state, on account of the rapidly advancing French troops, that no man dared his neighbour, let alone a stranger. The sailor took but little heed of the black looks cast upon him, but warmed himself at the blazing fire,

and was thankful that nothing worse than surly looks came his way. He spoke to no one but the host or the hostess, and these people he addressed in a rough peremptory manner, bidding the woman prepare him some supper, and commanding the man to have a drosky and horses in readiness for him at dawn, to take him as far as the village of Svir. At the mention of Svir, one or two of the peasants by the fireside began to curse; and one declared that Prince Otto was in league with the French, and ought to be hanged or burnt alive.

The sailor's quick wit turned these mutterings to advantage. "Ah," he said, "you may perhaps tell me something I have come from Moscow to learn concerning the prince. Is he a friend to the French, and a foe to holy Russia, or not? Tell me all you know."

But the peasants, like all fellows of a baser class, were glad enough to deal in innuendoes; but when asked to risk their own interests by speaking out plainly, and telling all they knew, or thought they knew, closed up at once, and refused to say a word.

"Never mind," he said at last, "I shall find out all I want to know to-morrow; and if Prince Otto is false to Russia, it will be the worse for him in the end."

Without another word he seized a roll of sheepskins, and spreading them in a comfortable position near the fire, laid himself down; and, in spite of his surroundings, was soon snoring gloriously, his utter recklessness having, for the time being, disarmed all suspicion. His first check came in the dawning, when he was awakened by an unusual hubbub. He sprang to his feet, and demanded to know what all the confusion meant; and was told that orders had just arrived, borne by a Cossack officer, that the hamlet and all it contained was to be destroyed at once by fire, as the French were within a few hours'

march of the place. This was serious news to the sailor, as it threw new impediments in his path. Calling the host upon one side, he offered him a substantial bribe to fix a pair of horses in a drosky, and drive him on to Svir. The fellow raised all sorts of objections; he wanted the drosky and the horses for himself and his family, he said.

"But," retorted the sailor, "you will not be able to take them across the river with you in the boats, and there is not time to drive ten leagues to the nearest bridge, for it will be blown up to prevent the French from crossing."

"You seem to know too much," asserted the inn-keeper suspiciously; and he went off to acquaint the Cossack officer with his suspicions.

The officer, who was one of those men brutal by nature and a disgrace to the fine body of cavalry he represented, was only too glad to have an opportunity of airing his importance; and he ordered the sailor to be brought into his presence, and at once began to cross-examine him upon the nature of his business with Otto, Prince of Svir, a man deeply branded with suspicion. The sailor used all his craft to allay the Cossack's suspicion, but it is doubtful whether it would have been successful, for the man seemed to suspect that all was not as it should be; but at this juncture a new diversion and a new danger arose, for a breathless peasant dashed in and informed the Cossack that a troop of French dragoons were in sight, coming rapidly towards the village of Minck. At that the Cossack officer, who had hitherto carried himself with excessive swagger, sprang up from his seat, rushed out of the house he had made his headquarters, and leaping into the saddle galloped off, with his posse of men, at a very great rate, apparently careless of what might befall the good people of the hamlet of Minck. And, as

most of the inhabitants seemed busy about their own affairs just then, the sailor once again found himself free to look after his own interests.

So, once again, he betook himself to the seller of vodka, and renewed his offer of a heavy sum for a drosky and a pair of horses; but the man shook his head sullenly and refused to budge or to let his horses go; for, to get to Svir, he would have to travel the way the French dragoons were coming; and he had no stomach for such a journey, neither had he any desire to see his property going in such a direction. So, placed fairly in the lap of a dilemma, the sailor had to wait patiently and watch the developments of the game into which he had entered.

He saw the French dragoons clatter into the hamlet—a superb body of men, who sat their horses like fellows who had ridden sword in hand half over Europe, often fighting hard, but always conquering. About four horse-lengths in front of the troop rode a small man on a grey stallion. He had upon his head the cap of a Polish private soldier, and on his shoulders a common soldier's cloak; but the dead white face and the gloomy eyes, under the private's cap, told the sailor, at a glance, that this was the man who held the peace of the world in his palm. There was no fire in his eye, no passion on his lip or brow, nothing showed in his face but dead cold, inexorable resolve. The officer in charge of the troop twirled his moustache, in fierce disdain, as he entered Minck; his troopers glanced around them with contemptuous levity; but the man in front of all, the man in the cap and cloak of the Polish private, neither smiled nor frowned—he simply looked, and where he looked he blighted. The vodka-house was the first place that seemed to arrest his attention; he gave it a second swift glance, and then he drew rein and

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dismounted. A trooper darted forward and caught his bridle-rein. Bonaparte, without a moment's hesitation, entered the wretched inn, if such it could be called; and, seating himself at the table, drew from the inside pocket of his mantle a map, and at once became absorbed in a study of what lay before him. As for the human beings in the room, they might have been logs of wood for all the attention he gave them.

The officer of the dragoons had meanwhile checked his troops with a gesture of his hand; and they, like the old campaigners they were, had slipped quickly out of their saddles, and now stood by their horses' bridles, smoking and chatting, as only Bonaparte's veterans would have dared to do. In the twinkling of an eye the officer had despatched men to guard every door and window of the wretched place, where the Emperor of all the French sat poring over his maps. No one could leave or enter unseen or unchallenged. After a little time, Bonaparte seemed puzzled by something upon his map; he raised his dull, white face and his sombre eyes, and looked around the room. His eyes fell upon the sailor.

"Come here," he commanded, in his harsh imperious way.

The sailor stepped forward at the word of command. Bonaparte put a dozen questions to him swiftly, one after the other, questions which only a native of the place could have answered. The sailor was at fault,—he made one excuse after another, but only blundered deeper and deeper in the mire. Then came silence. Bonaparte sitting still as a piece of marble, his right hand spread out palm downwards on the table, his left hand clenched upon his map, with the exception of the index finger which pointed to the spot he was examining. His head was bent forward, his shoulders

rounded—more like the shoulders of the student than the shoulders of the soldier. His brow was bent; his dark eyes, those dead inhuman eyes, gazed unwaveringly into the eyes of the sailor. Suddenly, his harsh voice cut in upon the stillness.

“You are not of these parts, sir?”

“No, sire.”

“You are a native of—where?”

“Of Moscow, sire.”

“You lie!”

The sailor's cheek blazed a ruddy crimson, and his hand dropped to the pistol in his pocket. Bonaparte saw the flush of anger, and the grip of the hand on what he guessed was a pistol-butt.

“You lie, sir,” he repeated coldly, unemotionally; “you are a native of England and a spy. England's spies are everywhere.”

The officer of dragoons, hearing the Emperor's words, stepped into the room, and, placing his hands on the sailor's shoulders, said, “I arrest you, monsieur.”

The sailor looked the great Corsican full in the face, and said, “You are right, sire—I lied; I am an Englishman.” He knew that he could not play a part with this man, though he might have done so with almost any of his officers.

“A Russian agent for the time being, I suppose,” was the cold remark that greeted this bluff confession.

“I am an English sailor here, in Russia, on private concerns, and am neither Russian agent nor British spy, sire.”

The dead white face with the unwinking eyes never moved. “Your business here, what was it?”

“My cousin is the wife of Otto, Prince of Svir. I came to take her to England, to be in time to get her father's blessing before he dies.”

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“Come to warn Otto, Prince of Svir, that French troops would be in his district before he had time to destroy the granaries of the countryside. You have played and lost, sir—you will die to-day.”

Like fire through flax, the news spread through Minck, that the cousin of the Princess of Svir had been arrested, and condemned to death as a spy by the French; and the Russians rejoiced, for was he not a foreigner, and above all an Englishman? But in the little Jewish community of Minck, there was a different feeling; for, amongst the Jews, the history of the princess was known. Far and near, in every Hebrew home, Mr. Thornton had caused it to be proclaimed that she was of the blood of the man who had helped the Jews, when they fled from Svir, on that far-off but never-to-be-forgotten day. So the Jews of Minck sorrowed for the fate of the Englishman, and debated amongst themselves whether they could do anything to soften the heart of the French Emperor towards his victim. As for the sailor, he sat on a barrel, in the cellar of the vodka-house, and thought of all things, as he listened to the tread of the French sentry, as he paced to and fro over the trap-door that made the cellar a dungeon. Now and again he heard the sentry hum a line of a song, or heard him sharply calling to some inquisitive peasant, who peeped through the window above; and he knew that there was no hope of escape for him, for Bonaparte's men were perfect in their discipline. He had taken the dingy oil-lamp they had left him, as soon as he was alone, and had looked round the cellar, and saw that it was nothing but a square hole hewn out of the earth—just that and nothing more. Then he had placed the evil-smelling lamp upon the floor, and had seated himself—to wait, like a man, for the end.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DEBT IS PAID IN FULL

IT was deepening towards dusk in Svir—the dusk of the day on which Captain George Fiveash was to die in Minck. Otto, Prince of Svir—a gloomy, savage, hopeless man,—paced the long avenue in front of his castle, enwrapped in bitter thoughts. He had rejoiced when he heard that Bonaparte intended to invade Russia; because he had hoped that the Czar would remember his military talents, and make use of him to drive back the invaders; but no word had come to him. He was dead to Russia; for the Muscovite government never forgives, never forgets. In the castle his wife sat at a window, and watched her lord pace to and fro, but her thoughts were her own. In the village the people moved about, as if stirred by some passing wave of human feeling. Some far-flung echo of the advancing war reached them, and they murmured against their prince because he took no steps to teach them how to defend the soil from the invading army. All at once a horseman came at full speed into the village, and, as he rode, he cried, “The French, the French are coming!” and he spurred on to the castle. In the avenue he met Prince Otto. “Regnier and his chasseurs are coming,” he panted; “they ride with loosened bridles, and their horses’ heads are towards Svir.” With a laugh, that gave

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the key to his nature, the prince turned, and went into the castle, and, going to the armoury, took down from the wall an axe that had belonged, of old time, to some Danish chief. The blade was long and narrow, curving upwards at both ends; the handle was of pieces of whalebone, lashed together with green hide. In the hands of such a man as Otto of Svir, it was a deadly and a gruesome weapon; for neither horse nor man would need to feel its edge twice. He took the axe in his hand, and went to where his wife was sitting looking out of the window. She turned her head at the sound of his step, and saw his splendid figure, towering through the gloom of the room. His dark, close-fitting tunic, his black cloth riding-breeches, and high boots reaching to his knees, his round fur cap, which left his brutal face revealed, all helped to make him look a perfect picture of a fighting animal.

"The French are at our gates," he said, "and I go to give them a welcome; are you sorry to part with me, Jane?"

She had looked at him coldly, without fear, but with a great hate in her eyes, before he had spoken; now she rose from her seat, and, resting her hand upon the back of her chair, she said, steadily, "Am I sorry to part with you, Otto, sorry to part with the man who has made my life what it has been since I have been here? I tell you that if there are a thousand French sabres in the village, I hope every one of them will reach you."

He swung the axe aloft, but she never flinched; and something in her eyes made him think that she would be glad if he struck. "No," he said, dropping his arm, "I'll leave you to the French soldiery; those *canaille* of the Republic will rejoice to have a real princess for a plaything." And, with this taunt, he left her, and strode off to the village.

His appearance, axe in hand, brought the peasants to his side with fierce cries of joy. Once more he was their lord ; they fawned upon him, then, ready to do his bidding, for the one redeeming trait in the Russian peasant's nature is his instinctive love of the soil that breeds him. He gave them neither praise nor thanks, but bade them send the old men and the women and children to the woods, the same dark forbidding woods that had engulfed the Jews of Svir in his great-grandfather's time. Then, when this was done, he bade each man take his axe, and go into his house, leaving the door ajar. "When I give the signal," said he, "then let every man rush out and do his worst upon the Frenchmen—rush upon the horses, and hew at their legs ; and, when they fall, do not spare the riders."

In less than a minute the long narrow street of Svir, flanked on both sides by low squalid dwellings, was empty ; every house-door stood ajar ; no smoke issued from any chimney, no light twinkled anywhere ; the village looked deserted, desolate. An hour passed by ; then came the clatter of horses' feet, the jingle of sabres clanking against boot-heels, curt commands in sharp ringing tones ; and Regnier's famous chasseurs came trooping three abreast along the streets of Svir, the celebrated general at their head. Half-way up the village he halted, and swung half round in the saddle. He could see the castle from where he sat. "They have left the village, and have gone to the castle," he said to his second in command. "Forward ! we will rout them out of that before dark."

Prince Otto, standing behind the half-closed door of the house right opposite heard the words, and a smile for a second flickered across his face. "The village first, my general," he muttered, "the castle

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afterwards, and all it contains; and I wish you joy and a merry time up there."

On went the French, until Regnier, riding in advance, was just clear of the streets, and his men, riding three abreast, filled the long narrow lane to overflowing. Then suddenly Prince Otto threw aside the door of the hovel that had sheltered him, and gave a great cry. The next moment he had leaped upon the chasseur nearest him, and brought horse and man rolling to the earth, with one swinging stroke of the great Danish axe.

At his cry every door opened, and the peasants darted out, and fell upon the French chasseurs. In a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—all was chaos; axes rose and fell; sabres flashed from scabbards; yells and counter-yells were heard; horses reared and plunged, and bit and drove their iron-shod heels in all directions. In that narrow space the centre man of each row of chasseurs was helpless, whilst the two outside men had to contend with men on foot, who smote at horse or man, whichever was nearest, and in such a medley the peasants, with their heavy short-handled axes, had all the best of it.

If Regnier's glorious cavalry had stayed to fight it out to the bitter end in that trap, they would have fared badly at the hands of the Russian peasants; but Regnier, the man of infinite resource, the man who had never failed Bonaparte in a desperate enterprise, was not likely to fail now. He gave the command as coolly as if on parade, "Chasseurs, forward, charge!" And every man who could lift bridle charged onward, thinking nothing of what lay around him. Now and again a man cut to the right hand or to the left with his sabre as he rode on, but otherwise no notice was taken of the peasants and their attack. But when the troops passed through Svir,

then Regnier halted his men and surrounded the village.

"Let no man escape," said he, "and let no stone stand one on top of another to mark where the village of Svir once stood."

Then the chasseurs dismounted, and took each house in its turn, and set fire to it, and all who rushed out met the sabre edge or point, until only a remnant was left, and they gathered round Otto of Svir on the very spot where old Eli Strassgood had perished of old time, and nothing lay before the remnant but death. Then it was that Prince Otto's heart failed him. Throwing down his axe he cried to General Regnier, "The women and the children are alone in the forest; give these men quarter and take my life."

For the first and only time in his life General Regnier forgot that he was a Frenchman, and remembered only that he was a Jew; centuries of persecution, of outrage, and of wrong seethed in his blood.

"Too late!" he cried, "too late! Otto, Prince of Svir, too late have you remembered that 'the Watcher on the tower never wearies.' As you did to my people, so will I do to yours. Chasseurs of France, onward and avenge the men who fell in Svir!"

Then came the thunder of flying hoofs, the gleam of steel in the gloaming, and Otto, a craven for the first and last time in his life, cowered before the storm; and, when it passed, no man in Svir was alive to tell the tale. Not a house was spared in Svir. That night from every roof the red flames leaped and glowed; the roofs fell in; the walls, bitten by the flames, collapsed—and Svir was a ruin; only the castle was left, and towards the castle the soldiers sprang. They were out of hand now, maddened, as soldiers become maddened, by the sight of fire,

slaughter, and pillage. They burst into the castle, they put the torches to a hundred places, and, as the flames sprang up, they laughed and shouted and sang, until one caught sight of the princess, looking more lovely than she had ever looked, her beautiful white hair shrouding her youthful face. The soldier, maddened by the scenes through which he had gone, rushed towards her. Had he caught her then in that wild moment, Otto of Svir's threat had been fulfilled, and his vengeance perfected; but, with a swift spring, she darted through a doorway, and turned the key in the massive door. At the next moment she appeared at the window in that part of the building that was wrapped in flames; she had made her choice—and her choice was death, before the soiling touch of the common soldiery could reach her. At that moment she looked wondrous lovely, the grey old walls around her blushing crimson in the firelight, the mingled drab and crimson of the great bank of flame behind her—simply dressed, her snow-white hair crowning her brow like a silver halo, she looked superb. So thought General Regnier, as he gazed on her from the shadows of the avenue.

“By heavens, she is too good to die like that!” he cried; “if no one else will go to her rescue I will go myself.” He unbuckled his sword and threw it at his feet, when he saw a man leap through the lower window, and disappear inside the castle; a few minutes later he saw the same man dash through the smoke to the window where the princess stood, outlined by the flames. The rescuer, whoever he was, did not stand upon ceremony, but, throwing his arms round the princess, tossed her upon his shoulder, and, stepping on to the window-sill, leapt clean out into the night. A score of soldiers rushed to render aid, and General Regnier was not far behind his men.

The princess and her rescuer lay in a tumbled heap together on the grass. Strong arms bore them both to a place of safety. But the shock had left the princess unconscious, though her rescuer, after the first stunning effects of his leap had passed, seemed little the worse for his adventure.

When the French general congratulated him upon his safe escape he said coolly, "I have leaped further and for less cause in my time, monsieur."

"You are not a Russian, unless I am in error, monsieur?"

"What does it matter? I am a man who has saved a woman; that should be sufficient passport to a Frenchman who is a soldier and a gentleman. The princess is safe in your keeping, General?"

"As safe as in her mother's arms, monsieur."

"Ah!" said the stranger, with a sigh, then nothing else matters."

CHAPTER XXXI

SHOOT THE BRITISH SPY

BONAPARTE, accompanied by an officer of engineers, had ridden down the banks of the river Svir, to make his own unfathomable calculations. He was dressed, as we saw him last, in the Polish soldier's cap and cloak, though, to any one who had once seen him, that disguise was too flimsy for any practical result. It was evening when he returned from Minck, and his first order when he dismounted from his horse was, "Bring out the British spy and shoot him."

The officer saluted, wheeled, and went off to obey. He told a sergeant to line a file of men in front of the opposite wall, and he himself with a couple of soldiers went to the cellar where the Englishman had been placed; the sentry stood upon the trap-door.

"Open the door, comrade," commanded the officer. The soldier obeyed. "Step this way, monsieur," cried the officer, peering into the cellar. There was no reply. The officer shrugged his shoulders. "Those fellows are so phlegmatic; he sleeps on the eve of his execution," he said to the soldiers.

"He can soon enjoy his nap again," answered the sentry.

"Come up, Monsieur Anglaise," shouted the officer. Still there was no reply, "We must go down and wake him," said the officer. And he entered the

cellar ; it was empty. He snatched up the lantern that still smoked drearily upon the floor, and looked around him. At first he saw nothing ; but, as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom of the place, he made out a narrow tunnel in the side of the cellar. One glance at this showed him that a door cunningly made of wood and dried earth, which could only be opened from the tunnel side, had given the prisoner a chance of escape. Drawing his sword, the Frenchman made his way with all possible speed down the tunnel until it led him to the river's edge.

"A nice mess we have got into," he growled. "Who would have thought that those dull clods could have had such a scheme as this afoot? I'll warrant, a good many things came down this river into this passage, and so into the vodka-house, that the Czar's officers knew nothing of." Sheathing his sword he wended his way slowly back to the cellar. Placing the lantern where he had found it, he went to the room above, and commanded the soldiers to stand guard. He then marched briskly to the common room, where Bonaparte sat absorbed in his eternal maps.

"Sire."

"Well?"

"The English spy has escaped."

The death mask of a face which fronted the soldier never changed ; only the pupils of the dark heavy eyes contracted until they became two glittering points of flame.

"How?"

The officer told his story. Bonaparte listened and watched his face. At the close of the recital he rose without a word, passed down the passage to the cellar, and, entering, picked up the lamp and examined the door of the tunnel ; then he passed along the tunnel, and did not stop until he faced the river.

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"The man who planned this was not a fool," was all he said; then he walked back and took up his maps again.

"Send the master of the house to me."

The Russian came—a heavy-browed, stolid-looking man. Bonaparte swept him with a glance. "You saw the prisoner placed in the cellar?"

"Yes."

"You did not tell me of the passage from the cellar to the river."

The man gaped open-mouthed. "No."

"Why not?"

Because the passage could only be opened from the river side; no man in the cellar could open it."

"Who knew of that passage beside yourself?"

"Only Borris, the boatman."

"Who is he?"

"A Jew."

"Well, my friend, either you or Borris the Jew has released my prisoner, and one of you must die in the prisoner's place."

"Shoot Borris," was the surly answer.

"Certainly, if he is guilty. Where is he?"

"I am not Borris's keeper."

"The worse for you, then; for if he is not found, you die—the firing-party is ready." Then, turning his eyes on the officer, he said, "Take him away and let him find Borris the Jew within half an hour; if not, let him pay the price. Borris was not found, and the vodka-seller of Minck paid the full price. Bonaparte never ordered out a firing-party for nothing. The next day he crossed the Svir, and pushed on like a human cataract towards Moscow; and we lose sight of him for ever.

CHAPTER XXXII

FAREWELL

IN a grey church with a square tower, in Leicester town, a few of England's greatest men and women are gathered. The body of the old church is filled with homely, honest folk; outside, the streets are filled with a great mass of the common people. All are eager, all are whispering. Trafalgar has been fought and won; many of the heroes of that mighty day are at home, reaping the laurels they have gained so nobly. There are some hundreds of rough tars in this Leicestershire crowd, and the country lasses make much of them. Who would not make much of such men?—the bull-dog breed who tamed the haughty Frenchmen's pride, and taught the Gaul that, on the seas, the Anglo-Saxon brood are masters for all time. The quality are getting impatient inside the church. Suddenly, a woman, white-haired but beautiful, steps from a coach, and takes the arm of a young man, who looks very much like her, only on his face there is no hope, whilst hers is kindling with joy. A minute later a man, in the uniform of a rear-admiral, springs nimbly from a chaise, and laughs the rich full laugh of the sons of the sea, in answer to something that a tall, elderly, Jewish-looking man says to him. The tars catch sight of him, and roar, just such a bull-dog roar as they did

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when he drove his ship headlong through the Frenchmen's line of battle at Trafalgar. He turned and looked steadily at the mass of people; then, something in the great smiling wave of faces turned towards him appealed to him, and he stood and laughed like a boy—a great, whole-souled, breezy laugh, that set the crowd roaring again with delight. Then he walked into the dim, cool church, and took his place beside the woman with the snow upon her head, and the summer in her eyes; and there he stood until the bishop declared George Fiveash, rear-admiral of His Majesty's fleet, and Jane, Princess of Svir, man and wife. The bells pealed out a joyous peal of peace and hope; the mighty throng made Leicester town re-echo with deep-throated roars; flowers fell around the proud sailor and his English bride; and all the world was fair, as Mr. Thornton, standing bare-headed, held the door of the coach open for them, and murmured, as they both leant out to touch his hand, "Peace be upon you and your children; may you never forget that 'The Watcher on the tower never wearies.'"





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